Q&A for Week of 09/30/2020 – 10/06/2020

1. Can a faith-based institution count as a low-income service provider for the purposes of being considered a Qualifying Subscriber?

Yes, however Applicants should be aware of the portion of the draft contract which reads “The funds provided under this contract may not be used to fund religious worship, exercise, or instruction. No person shall be required to participate in any religious worship, exercise, or instruction in order to have access to the facilities funded by this grant.”

More broadly, where low-income service provision is not the sole purpose of an organization, measures may need to be taken to ensure that benefits support only the low-income service activities of the organization. These measures may be negotiated as deemed necessary by Commerce at the time of contract negotiation.

1. Can a non-profit electric utility act as a Low-Income Service Provider for the purposes of being considered a Qualifying Subscriber?

Yes, however Applicants should be aware of the response to LICSD Q&A Question 1, above, which in part states “where low-income service provision is not the sole purpose of an organization, measures may need to be taken to ensure that benefits support only the low-income service activities of the organization. These measures may be negotiated as deemed necessary by Commerce at the time of contract negotiation.” Public entities other than those listed in the definition for Low-Income Service Providers listed in RFA Section 1.7 DEFINITIONS may not qualify as Low-Income Service Providers for the purposes of this solicitation.

Applicants may also refer to RFA Section 1.2, which states “Pursuant to Clean Energy Transformation Act (CETA), measures that lower Energy Burden(as defined in SECTION 1.7 DEFINITIONS) include, but are not limited to, weatherization, conservation and efficiency services, and monetary assistance, such as a grant program or discounts for lower income households, intended to lower a household's Energy Burden.” Such programs and services may qualify as measures that lower the Energy Burden of Qualifying Subscribers provided they meet all other requirements outlined in the RFA.

Updated 10/14/2020: added clarification around public entities listed in Low-Income Service provider definition.

1. Can a school district that serves a high percentage of low income students (as defined by eligibility for free or reduced meals or some other metric) qualify as a low-income participant? Could this grant be used to install a solar array on a school rooftop and have them be the sole subscriber or beneficiary of the output?

Please see the response to LICSD Q&A Question 2, above. Public entities other than those listed in the definition for Low-Income Service Providers listed in RFA Section 1.7 DEFINITIONS may not qualify as Low-Income Service Providers for the purposes of this solicitation. If the school is a non-profit meeting the definition of Low-Income Service Provider, then it could act as the solar beneficiary of project benefits (RFA Section 1.3 MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS for more detail).

Updated 10/14/2020: added clarification around public entities listed in Low-Income Service provider definition.

1. Can the project span multiple meters and parcels?

Commerce has placed no restrictions on the number of meters that may benefit from a given project site. Per RFA Section 1.7 DEFINITIONS, Subscribers must be “a retail electric customer of an electric utility or individual residing within a retail electric utility territory who owns or is the beneficiary of one or more units of a Community Solar project directly interconnected with that same utility.”

RFA Section 1.3 MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS states that “At each project site, Applicant must plan to construct one or more solar arrays, which together have a nameplate generating capacity of more than 100 kW DC. A project site must be limited to one property, or to contiguous properties owned by the same entity.” A project site may span multiple parcels within a given property, provided they are owned by the same entity.

1. Do you anticipate extending the bid due date?

At this time, Commerce does not anticipate extending the application deadline listed in RFA Section 2.2 ESTIMATE SCHEDULE OF PROCUREMENT ACTIVITIES.

1. What additional details are you willing to provide, if any, beyond what is stated in bid documents concerning how you will identify the winning bid?

Applicants should refer to RFA SECTION 4.1-4.2 for all publicly disclosed information regarding application evaluation for the Low-Income Community Solar Deployment (LICSD) program.

1. Was this bid posted to the nationwide free bid notification website at [www.mygovwatch.com/free](http://www.mygovwatch.com/free)? Other than your own website, where was this bid posted?

All Washington state competitive solicitations are posted to the Washington Electronic Business Solution (WEBS) platform. COMMERCE has posted the RFA and other application materials to the program website identified in the RFA and to WEBS. COMMERCE takes no responsibility for LICSD program materials posted to other webpages.

Q&A for Week of 10/07/2020 – 10/13/2020

1. We have a portfolio of solar projects that spans multiple properties and system sizes, one or two of which will meet criteria for the LICSD. We have matching funds for the portfolio of projects. How much of these matching funds may be counted toward the LICSD request? For example: 500 kW across 6 sites (1 site > 100kW DC), totaling $1M with $800k (80%) non-state funds. If we request $200k (20% of the total project and 100% of the cost of the qualifying project), will any matching funds be eligible?

All project sites included in the application must meet the minimum qualifications described in the RFA (including, but not limited to, “At each project site, Applicant must plan to construct one or more solar arrays, which together have a nameplate generating capacity of more than 100 kW DC.”). Applications that include sites that do not meet minimum qualifications may be considered non-responsive and be disqualified from further consideration. Applicants should also be aware that final payment, as well as any progress payments negotiated for completed milestones may be tied to progress across all project sites included in the application.

1. Are educational activities associated with project installation conducted in partnership with Tribal and technical colleges, eligible reimbursable expenditures?

While such activities are in many cases important to ensuring equitable project implementation, because the Clean Energy Fund is funded through the State Capital Budget, there is a requirement that “All project costs must be necessary for and directly connected to the acquisition and installation of the solar array.” Beyond possible limited exceptions, educational activities are typically not considered to be eligible, reimbursable expenditures of the grant funding or eligible match.

1. Are community colleges eligible to apply?

Eligible applicants include 501(c)(3) Non-Profits, Federally Recognized Tribal Governments, Housing Authorities, or Retail Electric Utilities. If a community college is one of these, they are primary eligible applicants. If not, they may still partner with an eligible applicant to apply. Please also see the definition of Qualifying Subscriber and the answer to LICSD Q&A Question #3 for information on which entities can act as Qualifying Subscribers for the purposes of this program.

1. Is the meeting rescheduled? I am unable to connect to the Skype and Conf. Call.

Pre-Application Conference 1 was not rescheduled. Please ensure you were using the correct call-in information, as there is different information for each pre-application conference. We have only received one report of issues to date. Please also consider attending future pre-application conferences or viewing recordings on the website and submitting any additional questions via email.

1. Could one or more of our affordable housing properties (where the housing provider pays the common area electricity bills) subscribe to one of the community solar gardens that eventually gets built as a result of the Clean Energy Fund, Low-Income Community Solar Deployment Grant? And how do we get in contact with the community solar garden developers to subscribe?

See RFA Section 1.7 DEFINITIONS for a definition of Low-Income Service Provider. Many affordable housing providers are considered Low-Income Service Providers, and residents of affordable housing providers may also be considered Low-Income Households. Depending on their incorporation status, they may also be eligible primary applicants for the grant awards. Contact and partnership arrangements between Applicants and contractors, including and requested bids or project designs, are the responsibility of Applicants.

1. Are non-profit housing providers excluded from applying?

Primary eligible applicants include 501(c)(3) Non-Profits, Federally Recognized Tribal Governments, Housing Authorities, or Retail Electric Utilities (See RFA Section 1.3 MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS; Also see RFA Section 1.7 DEFINITIONS for definitions for these terms). If the non-profit housing provider is one of these, they may apply independently; if not, they may partner with a primary eligible Applicant to apply.

1. If a retail electric utility is applying, I would assume the 'letter from the retail electric utility' is not expected. However, since I see that is designated as optional and scored, does that mean we are missing out on potential additional points?

Some components of this letter may not be relevant to retail electric utilities, but some may still be relevant – such as coordination related to expected grid impacts (utilities may find internal coordination is necessary to evaluate this). Commerce expects to apply the RFA requirements and scoring criteria equally across applicant types, so retail electric utilities are still required to submit a letter under this attachment request if they wish to receive points in this category.

1. Is there a minimum number of subscribers required?

RFA Section 1.3 MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS addresses this: “Limiting distribution of benefits to a single Qualifying Subscriber is allowable only if that Qualifying Subscriber is a Low-Income Service Provider.” So the minimum number of Qualifying Subscribers is one (1) if that subscriber is a Low-Income Service Provider – otherwise, the minimum is two (2).

1. Maintenance is not covered, but site-prep is covered, is this a negotiable subject? If some maintenance is required in the physical location of installation.

The listed examples of eligible and ineligible are not negotiable, but whether or not a specific activity is considered eligible could depend on work whether the work is required for site preparation. The term “Maintenance” that is included under ineligible, non-reimbursable expenditures in RFA Section 1.2 OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF WORK generally refers to maintenance over the life of the project. That list is non-exhaustive and project costs will be negotiated at the time of contract negotiation.

1. Does the subscriber need to be a separate entity from the retail electric utility?

The definition of both Subscriber and Qualifying Subscriber are included under RFA Section 1.7 DEFINITIONS, and a Retail Electric Utility could generally act as a Subscriber, provided meets that definition. Please see the answer to Q&A Question #2, above, for information on Retail Electric Utilities active as Qualifying Subscribers under the definition of Low-Income Service Provider.

1. For the scoring of the description of how a system is going to address peak demand, what would be compelling information to provide?

Ultimate scoring decisions for applications are up to the review panel to determine, so it is difficult for Commerce to offer guidance as to how Applicants should design their projects. The RFA does specifically mention western orientation and tracking systems as possible methods of addressing peak demand.

1. The RFA specifically mentions: If the project would be interconnected on the distribution grid and would help address peak demand considerations, the Applicant’s response should describe what steps they have taken to verify this with the local electric utility, and what steps if any would be taken to ensure the array helps to meet peak demand. Question: Is that for behind the meter projects to investigate how it would lower the site host's peak demand or in front of the meter projects to investigate utility distribution system peaks?

Commerce has interpreted the proviso language that mandates this prioritization to mean reducing peak demand on the local electricity grid. Either behind the meter or in front of the meter projects may address this based on matching their peak generation to peak demand on the local electricity grid. There is no expectation that utilities carry out hosting capacity analysis for a given project, however Applicants seeking points for peak demand considerations should take reasonable steps to verify the projected impact of their project.

1. If a non-profit submits the application, are they required to be registered with WSU as a community solar implementer?

No, there is no such requirement in the RFA.

1. Will this opportunity be available next year?

The funding that is included under this solicitation is what is available under this program. There is no expectation that it will be renewed, so that is up to the discretion of the legislature.

1. Is there a scoring priority given between direct low income benefit vs. low income provider benefit?

Please refer to RFA Section 4.2 for application scoring guidance, and RFA Section 1.2 for information on prioritization. Commerce has not given specific guidance on such prioritization to Applicants, and the exact scoring rubric is not provided in the RFA. Overall, the largest categories of scoring criteria are around a) maximizing Energy Burden reduction and other benefits to Qualifying Subscribers, and b) impacts to Highly Impacted Communities and Vulnerable Populations, so Applicants may keep that in mind in preparing their applications.

1. What is the definition of behind/in front of the meter?

Because these terms are not used in the RFA and Commerce has not to date asserted that any program requirements or prioritization will be centered around any distinction between the two, Commerce is, for the time being, choosing not to define these terms for the purposes of this solicitation.

1. Please provide a definition of Total Solar Resource Fraction?

This language has been corrected in the RFA updated 10/14/2020 to read “annual average of daily solar radiation per square meter”, as per the original intent of this measure. This figure can be found using the tool linked in RFA Section 3.9 VERIFICATION OF SOLAR ASSET.

1. Going back to the Equity Narrative, I understand it’s more focused on how the project provides lowered energy burden and direct or indirect benefits, can the latter include equitable workforce and having women and BIPOC workforce?

RFA addresses this to a certain extent. To align with procurement laws and regulations, the following guidance is given with respect to subcontractors that are Minority-, Women-, Veteran-Owned Businesses or Small Businesses: “no preference on the basis of participation is included in the evaluation of Diverse Business Inclusion Plans submitted, and no minimum level of minority- and women-owned business enterprise (MWBE), Washington Small Business, or Washington State certified Veteran Business participation is required as a condition for receiving an award.”

That being said, there are certain workforce benefits that may be included under direct or indirect benefits, per RFA Section 3.2 B Equity Narrative: “Other direct or indirect benefits may include but are not limited to: job or training opportunities for members of Highly Impacted Communities or Vulnerable Populations.”

1. For the cost breakdown, do you need labor and material break downs from contractors?

In the application itself (available on the program website listed in RFA Section 2.1 RFA COORDINATOR), there is further information and the format for the budget and it is broken out by certain categories, including equipment costs, salaries, indirect and overheard, etc. There is no requirement to submit formal quotes or bids, though that may be helpful in preparing an accurate cost estimate.

1. For a utility applying, what's up with the 3 business references requirement?

Follow the instructions the best you can – it is up to Applicants to choose their business references. References may add to Applicants’ applications in different ways, speaking to experience relevant to the project such as that listed in RFA Section 3.3 B:

a. Solar PV project development and/or installation of related infrastructure;

b. Community engagement with groups relevant to the proposed project, including meaningful co-creation of similar projects; and

c. Other relevant experience that indicates the qualifications of the Applicant, and any subcontractors, for the performance of the potential contract.

1. In the draft RFA there was language that said the benefit to the low-income subscribers had to pay for the funding from Commerce over time. Is that language still in there, and how are you evaluating that? Is there some sort of maximum period, or standard window over which that is evaluated?

See RFA Section 1.2 concerning prioritization. That was changed from a minimum qualification to a strong prioritization (30% of total points are expected to center around Energy Burden reduction). This would be over the expected life of the project – it’s not uncommon for this to be 20 years for solar projects. Regardless, there should be some commitment to the level of payback you are committing to, and a clear path to show how that will be achieved.

1. As a 501(c)(3) Non-Profit Applicant, with the beneficiary being individuals connected to our work, can we have a project that is behind the meter on our office which would lower the cost of power to us and thereby allowing us to pass more services on to the clients. Is this consistent with the definition of Minimum Qualifications in Section 1.3 under Project Qualifications?

Without having the complete application, Commerce cannot definitively say whether a project is consistent with the Minimum Qualifications. That being said, generally this seems to align with the Minimum Qualifications, with the one caveat described in the answer to Q&A Question #2, above, for 501(c)(3)s that have other purposes beyond low-income service provision.

1. Grants to affordable housing property owners are only for community solar projects (>100 kW) at this time, not rooftop solar projects (e.g., a 10 kW system) or solar thermal projects?

Yes. According to RFA Section 1.3 MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS, the project must “produce solar electricity” and “have a nameplate generating capacity of more than 100 kW DC”.

1. The ARRA funding in the 2009 timeframe had numerous restrictions, requirements and onerous reporting stipulations. What are the ARRA requirements for the $2,328,000 in funds for this program?

Please see RFA Section 4.7 for requirements of successful applicants, including requirements specific to each funding source and reporting requirements.

1. Maintenance is not covered, but site- prep is covered – is this negotiable? What is the definition for site-prep? Can some maintenance be performed at the exact site of physical installation?

Please see the answer to Q&A Question #15, above.

1. What is the definition of behind the meter/in front of the meter

Please see the answer to Q&A Question #21, above.

1. On page 1 of the request for applications, the contract period is given as 6/25/21 to 6/23/23; however, on page 7 of the RFA, the period of performance is given as 6/1/21 to 5/31/23. What is the correct project period for this program?

The correct estimated period of performance is 06/25/21–06/23/23. The latter section will be corrected and an updated version of the RFA posted to the program website.

1. Item 9c on Attachment D states that the grant should not exceed $200,000 per megawatt. This would translate to $20,000 for a 100kW solar array, which might account for about 10% of the project cost. Item 9d (concerning the minimum 35% allocation of benefits to low income communities) suggests that 9c does not apply if a project satisfies the 35% threshold. Is the 35% requirement required for all projects, and if so, is 9c essentially a defunct section of the grant requirements such that the $200,000 per megawatt limit no longer applies? Can projects apply to receive as much as 100% of their project cost from this grant program?

This question references the program Proviso language, which is included as Attachment D to the draft contract (Exhibit D to the RFA). In this and past rounds of funding, item 9d of the enabling proviso has been interpreted to mean that at least 35% of program funding must be for community solar projects that provide solar electricity to the listed entities. Commerce does not intend to apply a $200,000 per megawatt maximum grant amount to projects that meet the minimum qualifications of LICSD2020. Projects can receive up to 100% of their project costs, provided those project costs are eligible, not exceeding the $1,000,000 maximum grant request, and comply with all other requirements of the RFA.

1. Can you please provide the weblink to the answered questions re: the LICSD grant? I do not see it on the grant program website.

Please see the link entitled “LICSD Q&A (Updated XX-XX-XXXX)”, with XX-XX-XXXX signifying the date of the latest Wednesday to pass, under the “Grant Program Materials” section. (NOTE: Given the fact that this question was asking about the location of a document where the question would typically be answered, a response was provided via email.)

Q&A for Week of 10/14/2020 – 10/20/2020

1. We have a portfolio of solar projects that spans multiple properties and system sizes, one or two of which will meet criteria for the LICSD. We have matching funds for the portfolio of projects. How much of these matching funds may be counted toward the LICSD request? For example: 500 kW across 6 sites (1 site > 100kW DC), totaling $1M with $800k (80%) non-state funds. If we request $200k (20% of the total project and 100% of the cost of the qualifying project), will any matching funds be eligible?

Please see Commerce’s response to Q&A Question #8, above.

1. Are educational activities associated with project installation conducted in partnership with tribal and technical colleges eligible reimbursable expenditures?

Please see Commerce’s response to Q&A Question #9, above.

1. Projects must be on contiguous properties owned by the same entity, can the project span multiple meters and parcels?

Please see Commerce’s response to Q&A Question #4, above.

1. Is there any consideration  or preference regarding how direct of a benefit a low-income household is receiving from the PV installation?

Please see Commerce’s response to Q&A Question #22, above.

1. I know that Public Housing Authorities (PHA) are eligible applicants, but can a PHA apply under a Limitied Liability Partnership that represents a Low-Income Housing Tax Credit property for which the PHA is the General Partner?

Likely the Limited Liability Partnership would not fit with the requirements in the RFA for an Applicant, though Applicants should check RFA Section 1.3 MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS and RFA Section 1.7 DEFINITIONS to make a determination as to whether their specific organization would be an eligible applicant. The Housing Authority may partner with organizations in preparing their application. In determining distribution of Energy Burden reduction and/or other benefits to Qualifying Subscribers of the project, the Housing Authority (or another organization meeting the definition of Low-Income Service Provider in RFA Section 1.7) or Low-Income Households could be considered Qualifying Subscribers.

1. Vulnerable and highly-impacted communities are defined in CETA. DOH will be providing a tool to identify highly impacted communities but it will not be availble in time to use for this RFA. Rules have not yet been finalized to provide additional guidance for vulerable communities. Given these timelines, what methodologies or tools do you recommend applicants using?

Commerce has provided definitions for Vulnerable Populations and Highly Impacted Communities in RFA Section 1.7 DEFINITIONS. Applications should align their explanations of benefits to these groups with the definitions provided in that section, and make it clear how they have identified (and/or will identify) beneficiaries. In addition, different components with the Site Information Data Sheet factor into scoring related to Highly Impacted Communities and Vulnerable Populations, so Applicants wishing to gain more points under this scoring category may wish to consider geographic factors as well.

1. Would there be a problem using for example the City of Tacoma’s tools for the same purposes given other tools may not be available?

To the extent local tools are available, those may be useful to Applicants in targeting their efforts and the impacts of their projects. If they intend to incorporate such tools into their application, Applicants should clearly demonstrate how those tools relate to the goals and definitions outlined in the RFA, and describe the data and/or methodologies that underpin the tools. Finally, Applicants should be aware that some scoring criteria are specific to other tools, as described in the application, which operate at a state or national level.

1. While we’re on the site information data sheet. If you put an array in a location that has maximum exposure/irradiation/whatever, the benefits of which would flow to a low-income service provider, the benefits are not necessarily relevant for the end beneficiaries. Just wanted to point that out – it’s there are multiple priorities outlined in the RFA.

There is somewhat limited flexibility in how Commerce can reasonably adjust the program at this point, given that we are in an open application period. However, we do welcome and appreciate the feedback, and the implications of project siting may be an issue that is worth revisiting for potential future rounds of this program, or for future rounds of different programs.

In response to this point in particular, there are a few points to consider. First, the program prioritizes multiple types of benefits to Qualifying Subscribers. Projects are under no obligation to achieve every one of the prioritized outcomes. In some cases, Applicants may find that there is tension between designing a project to prioritize one type of benefit as opposed to another. For this reason, Commerce has provided applicants with a high-level guide to application scoring (See RFA Section 4.2).

Additionally, there is [research](https://academic.oup.com/joeg/article/15/4/815/2412599) to suggest that adoption of solar technologies is in part tied to whether or not solar has been previously installed in the surrounding area. This [may be one factor among many](https://academic.oup.com/joeg/article/15/4/815/2412599) that contribute to income, racial, and other disparities in PV adoption.

1. Can you define direct benefits and indirect benefits - provide an example too please

Direct Benefits are those that are an immediate result from the project, including project revenues that are passed directly to Highly Impacted Communities or Vulnerable Populations. An example could be job or training opportunities for members of Highly Impacted Communities or Vulnerable Populations that are directly tied to the project itself.

Indirect Benefits are those that result as a secondary effect of the project or related activities, including services or other activities that are funded by the project and result in a benefit to Highly Impacted Communities or Vulnerable Populations. An example could be the health benefits to Highly Impacted Communities and/or Vulnerable Populations that are anticipated to result from decreased operation of a polluting power plant that is directly traceable to the project.

1. Food banks are included in the definition of a low-income service provider. However, food is not included as a measure to lower enery burdern. Would a food bank be eligible as a non-profit subscriber? Would food be considered a direct or indirect benefit?

The requirement in question is that the project must “pass through benefits, including a lowered Energy Burden, to Qualifying Subscribers”. So, a project that provides a lowered energy burden to the Qualifying Subscriber (in the example given, a food bank would be the Qualifying Subscriber) would be considered to align with the above requirement.

1. Uner 1.2 Objectives and Scope of Work shouldn't the fourth bullet point" Projects with lower cost per watt and projects that can document the applications on non-ste dollars toward the project reflect the exemption under 1.3 Minimum Qualification 3(angel)? Clarification—there is a carve out for “3a” projects. Revenue from solar project that goes to low-income service provider to pass through the low income communities. Looking at the budget proviso, does the cost per Watt not apply? It should not apply to alternative initiatives under 3a. Depending on where a project is located, you may have higher costs.

The budget proviso states a maximum threshold of award dollars per megawatt, but does not apply to projects that align with item 3d of the proviso. So projects could theoretically apply for funding up to 100% of the total project cost given that projects meeting the minimum qualifications for this solicitation will comply with 3d of the proviso. The prioritization of projects with a lower cost per watt is a means of ensuring that project costs remain reasonable, but there is no maximum threshold of grant funding per watt under this solicitation. This applies regardless of whether the project provides benefits to retail electric customers.

1. Why was higher total solar resource fraction added as a means of prioritization? is not supported by the budget proviso.

Please see the response to Q&A Question #24 above.

1. Under Minimum Qualification. Project Qalifications. "...limiting distribution of benefits to a single qualifying subscriber is allowable only if the qualifying subscriber is a low income service provider." Would this preclude an applicant from having more than one qualifying low income service provider as part of its program?

No, that is intended as a minimum. Please see the response to Q&A Question #15 above.

1. Can a utility act as both an applicant and qualified subscriber - low income service proveder?

Please see the response to Q&A Question #2 above.

1. If yes, could the utiltiy applicant include more than one qualified subscriber low-income service provider under this grant?

Including more than one Qualifying Subscriber under a single project is allowable, provided that the arrangement meets all other RFA requirements. Please see the response to Q&A Question #15 above.

1. Can a low income service provider submit more than one project?

Yes, provided the Low-Income Service Provider is also an eligible Applicant. Applicants should consider the guidance from RFA Section 2.11 MOST FAVORABLE TERMS that “…the application should be submitted initially on the most favorable terms which the Applicant can propose.”

1. Scattered site housing is not eligible? Homes First owns 42 properties - scattered site - all low income (50% or less AMI). We want to solar panel. Does this mean we are not eligible? We have already solared two of our properies. We meet all other qualfications. We can do 100 kw but not on one building.

Assuming “scattered site” means that the properties are not contiguous, the scattered sites could not be combined to constitute a single project site. The Applicant would still have to install more than 100 kW DC of solar generating capacity at each of the project sites. A project site must be limited to one property or contiguous properties owned by the same entity, though there is no requirement that the project site(s) be co-located with Qualifying Subscribers.

1. Do we know why this anti-scattered site choice was made? Is that a leg issue? Or a policy choice? I don’t see the purpose of the word “contiguous” – if we can provide the same outcome without being contiguous, why would you want to stop us from doing that?

The cited 100 kW threshold is drawn from the enabling legislation for the LICSD program, which states “Projects must be capable of generating more than one hundred kilowatts of direct current generating capacity.” In this and previous iterations of the program, Commerce has interpreted the intent of this language to mean that the named generation capacity be located at a single project site. From a policy perspective, this is partially in keeping with the fact that there have been numerous previous incentives dedicated to support single-site rooftop solar.

In Commerce’s initial draft of the program that was released to the public for input, Commerce included a more restrictive version of this requirement that was intended to align with predicted NEM arrangements. We received feedback from multiple entities providing comments that the NEM accommodations were not necessary, but that contiguous properties owned by the same entity should be allowed to function as a single project site. Commerce determined that this adjustment could be reasonably made while keeping with the 100 kW threshold and community solar focus of the program. Commerce received no comments indicating that a single-site requirement would be a barrier to participation by any Washington communities.

Finally, it is worth noting that there is no requirement that the solar array be sited on a given building, that it be sited on large apartment complexes, or that project site(s) be co-located with the Qualifying Subscribers. Both urban and rural communities may experience unique advantages and/or barriers with respect to project siting, and Commerce has attempted to allow flexibility to the extent feasible while keeping with the intent of the proviso.

1. Is leased land eligible?

Provided the project site aligns with the requirement that “A project site must be limited to one property, or to contiguous properties owned by the same entity”, leased land is not explicitly ruled out in the RFA. However, ownership arrangements are subject to contract negotiation and review as to compliance with contractual terms and conditions. Arrangements other than direct ownership would have to be considered on a case by case basis at the time of Commerce contract negotiation, as third party ownership may increase risk associated with the project.

1. Follow up for above: what if it is one property owned by, for example, a land trust, but there are low-income homeowners that owned the homes. The buildings owned by the low-income homeowners on the contiguous property could collectively host over 100kW.

Please see the response to Q&A Questions #4 and #58 as they relate to RFA Section 1.3 MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS Project Qualification #4. The definition of project site under this RFA is intended to reflect the land where the project is sited, and not any distinction related to the ownership of buildings or structures within the project sites.

That being said, Applicants should also see Commerce’s response to Q&A Question #55, above. The RFA does not rule out a situation in which the Applicant intends to site the solar arrays on a structure owned by a third party, however, ownership arrangements are subject to contract negotiation and review as to compliance with contractual terms and conditions. Arrangements other than direct ownership would have to be considered on a case by case basis at the time of Commerce contract negotiation, as third party ownership may increase risk associated with the project.

1. We have a property with multiple buildings and each building has multiple limited partners (with the Seattle Housing Authority being one of these partners). These buildings are all managed by the same housing provider. Would these properties be eligible for the low income community solar development grant?

Please see the response to Q&A Question #41, above, with respect to the eligibility of limited liability partnerships to act as primary eligible applicants. The primary eligible applicant may partner with other organizations in submitting their application.

1. Can you further define what "contiguous properties" means within the context of this grant?

Properties are considered contiguous if they share a common property boundary. Properties may still be considered contiguous if they are separated only by a public right of way, such as a road or rail corridor. If Applicants are uncertain whether specific properties would be considered contiguous, they are welcome to submit questions describing the situation and asking whether the properties described would be considered contiguous.

1. Awardees will be required to verify Commercial General Liability Insurance Policy for what duration/term?

According to the service contract template (Exhibit D to the RFA), “The Grantee shall submit to COMMERCE within fifteen (15) calendar days of a written request by COMMERCE.” There is no requirement in the draft contract as to the duration of the insurance, however “The Grantee shall provide insurance coverage that shall be maintained in full force and effect during the term of this Grant”.

1. Application requires description of how impacts/outcomes will be monitored, measured and reported to Commerce, but the only reporting requirements I could find are during the construction phase of the scope of work (pg 55 of RFA)… What, if any, reporting is required beyond project completion?

Please refer to RFA Section 4.7C REPORTING REQUIREMENTS for information on reporting requirements that are currently planned for projects funded under this RFA.

1. What, if any, documentation is required to verify the 13 year capital asset requirement?

No independent documentation is required at the time of application submission, however Applicants should clearly address this and all other minimum qualifications in their response to this RFA – including through the application Technical Proposal, which “should convey Applicant’s understanding of the high-level objectives and minimum qualifications of this RFA and how their project relates to these objectives.” (See RFA Section 3.2A Project Approach/Methodology)

1. Is the applicant required to own the property where the project is sited? Does that include Limited Partnerships of which the applicant is a general member?

Please see the response to Q&A Question #55, above. A similar principle will apply to situations where the Applicant is a part owner in the property.

1. I think I heard at the 10/13/20 conference that for profit limited partnerships and developers acting with and for nonprofit housing developers are not eligible applicants, is that correct?

Please see the response to Q&A Question #41, above.

1. If the primary applicant subcontracts to an installer, can this budget line item be all inclusive of the subcontractor’s equipment/salaries/benefits/indirect/overhead?

Applicants may break costs out in the way that they believe most fully and accurately represents their project. Providing the greatest level of detail within the provided template may help reviewers better understand the project costs. A more detailed project cost analysis is typically undertaken at the time of contract negotiations, and there is no guarantee that Apparently Successful Grantees will receive the full amount requested in their application, or that grantees will receive the full amount noted in their conditional award letter.

1. In section 2.32, “Procurement Standards for Federally Funded Programs”, I see local government or Indian Tribal government and non-profits listed as entities which must comply with these standards, but not retail electric utilities. Does this mean that if a retail electric utility was granted federal funding, they do not necessarily need to meet all of these standards?

Section 2.32 of the Service Contract Template with General Terms and Conditions (Federal) (Exhibit D to the RFA) includes information on Procurement Standards for Federally Funded Programs. It names three broad categories of requirements: first, requirements that are applicable to Grantees which are local governments or Indian Tribal governments; second, requirements that are applicable to Grantees which are nonprofit organizations; and third, requirements that are applicable to Grantees, regardless of their organization type.

1. Is an applicant expected to have identified all or the majority of potential system subscribers within the application? If not, is it expected that the ‘cashflow figures’ used for calculating energy burden reduction are more of a model than exact values?

There is no minimum qualification associated with having identified all or a majority of Qualifying Subscribers at the time of application submission. Applicants may score more highly across multiple of the scoring categories identified in RFA Section 4.2 EVALUATION BREAKDOWN based on the robustness of their plan for identification and qualification of Qualifying Subscribers (this may include having pre-qualified applicants, depending on the project scope).

Figures and calculations related to Energy Burden reduction (specific cashflow and projected total Energy Burden reduction; or allowable alternatives described in the RFA) should be provided by Applicants in as specific and concrete a form as is feasible at the time of application submission. If the absence of identified Qualifying Subscribers presents a barrier to the Applicant’s calculation of benefits, the Applicant should explain the uncertainty and present a commitment as to how they will determine benefit form and amounts.

1. Is this an annual program or a one-time opportunity?

Please see the response to Q&A Question #21, above.

1. Do this application for already developed properties or for properties are under development? Timelines do not seem suitable for installing solar on the later, so what are the considerations for timelines in the program?

There may be some variation from project to project, but the general expectation for certainty and minimizing risk is that Apparently Successful Grantees be ready to start contract work on the timeline noted in RFA Section 2.2 ESTIMATED SCHEDULE OF PROCUREMENT ACTIVITIES (under the “Begin Contract Work” heading).

In alignment with RFA Section 4.7B PROJECT REQUIREMENTS, which requires that projects be completed within 24 months of execution of the grant agreement, and depending on the scope of the project, Commerce may require that the Apparently Successful Grantee meet certain project readiness metrics (such as having a completed interconnection study) prior to contract execution.

Q&A for Week of 10/21/2020 – 10/27/2020

1. Components made in Washington and cost per watt are both listed as priority criteria in the RFA, but in state components generally increase cost per watt… which will be weighted more heavily?

Commerce has provided the level of detail on project scoring that it is prepared to offer at this time. Commerce may provide clarification as to meaning and other factors affecting scoring, but does not currently intend to provide specific comparisons between individual scoring categories. This is intended to avoid being overly prescriptive, and more broadly, such a comparison would not fully represent the interconnected impacts that a project has in Washington communities and that Commerce has attempted to reflect in application scoring.

On a general basis, as stated in RFA Section 3.4 COST PROPOSAL, “The evaluation process is designed to award this procurement not necessarily to the Applicant of least cost, but rather to the Applicant whose application best meets the requirements of this RFA. However, Applicants are encouraged to submit applications which are consistent with state government efforts to conserve state resources.”

1. I wanted to confirm that the updated RFA and Q&A files (indicated in text as updated 10/20 and 10/21, but file names include 10/14 and 10/12) are posted online: <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/growing-the-economy/energy/clean-energy-fund/clean-energy-fund-solar-program/>

The correct update dates for the RFA and Q&A at the time of this question’s submission were 10/12/2020 and 10/21/2020, respectively. The RFA update date was entered incorrectly on the website and has been corrected (the RFA document listed the correct date). The date for the Q&A listed on the program website is the date it was most recently updated, while the date listed in the file name is the date that began the most recent week of question collection (for example, this week contains an update with answers to new questions answered between 10/21/2020 and 10/27/2020, and is labeled LICSD\_Q&A\_Week20201021). Within each Q&A file, each update is labeled with dates when questions were posted, so Applicants should be able to check whether relevant date ranges are aligned.

1. In addition, when do you expect to post the recoding to Pre-Application Conference 3 held 10 a.m. PT on 10/15/2020 and additional Q&A? I am subscribed to Energy E-mail Updates – will notifications be sent out about these and any additional amendments?

Written Q&A responses to the questions received during Pre-Application Conference 3 were posted in the week following the conference, and are above, under the heading “Q&A for Week of 10/14/2020 – 10/20/2020”. As of this writing, Commerce has posted a recording of Pre-Application Conference 3.

Updates to the RFA are generally not announced via mass Commerce email lists unless they represent major changes to the program. As stated on the cover page of the RFA, “If you download this RFA from the Department of Commerce website, you are responsible for regularly checking the Program Website listed in RFA SECTION 2.1 RFA COORDINATOR in order for your organization to receive any RFA amendments or Applicant questions/agency answers.” As stated in RFA Section 2.6 REVISIONS TO THE RFA, “addenda will be provided via e-mail to all individuals who have made the RFA Coordinator aware of their interest.” Applicants may express interest in receiving RFA Addenda by reaching out in writing to the RFA Coordinator.

1. I will be submitting this grant on behalf of my employer. #4 says we need to print out two forms (attachments 5 and 6) and get signatures. We are working remotely and I was going to use docusign to complete these and submit. Will electronic signatures be accepted?

RFA Section 2.4 SUBMISSION OF APPLICATIONS states: “The cover submittal letter and the Certifications and Assurances form must have a scanned signature of the individual within the organization authorized to bind the Applicant to the offer.” As of this writing, Commerce is only authorized to accept digital signatures for the purposes of grant contract execution. To guarantee that your application is considered responsive, please follow the procedures outlined in the RFA.

Q&A for Week of 10/28/2020 – 11/03/2020

1. We already have two on-site solar projects slated to go in 2021 for two of our low-income multifamily properties, and I believe we’d satisfy all requirements for the grant except the minimum capacity or contiguous parcels; our projects are in the 40-50 kW range, given the size and positions of our roofs, but our projects are not on contiguous parcels. I’m certain we are not alone in this situation. Is there any way to make an exception to these specific requirements to allow low-income housing authorities who may not have large rooftops to hold 100 kW capacity systems the opportunity to qualify for the grant?

Please see the response to Q&A Question #54, above.

1. Our team is working with a for-profit entity to develop an application and we would like to clarify your definition of "primary eligible applicant". Does the 501(c)(3) need to just be the applicant / proposer, or do they also need to hold ownership of the solar array? Does the non-profit's participation in the project need to extend past the grant contract?

A similar principle applies to project ownership as to land ownership, as described in the response to Q&A Question #55, above. Third party ownership of projects is not explicitly ruled out in the RFA. However, ownership arrangements are subject to contract negotiation and review as to compliance with contractual terms and conditions. Arrangements other than direct ownership would have to be considered on a case by case basis at the time of Commerce contract negotiation, as third party ownership may increase risk associated with the project.

There is no blanket requirement that the Grantee be involved in the project following the completion of the scope of work outlined in the grant agreement, however it is worth noting that the Grantee’s involvement may be beneficial depending on the scope of work contemplated. For example, if some or all of the Energy Burden reduction resulting from a project were to occur after the completion of the grant agreement, there should be sufficient accountability mechanisms in place to ensure that the targeted Energy Burden reduction (or allowable substitute, see RFA Section 1.3 MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS) is achieved.

1. What are the programmatic requirements of an applicant/affordable housing provider after the two year period? Are there ongoing reporting or other obligations to Commerce or DOE?

Please see the second paragraph of the response to Q&A Question #74, above, for more information on Grantee involvement after the completion of the contracted scope of work.

1. What demographic and/or income criteria are used for minimum qualifications and prioritization?

A non-exhaustive summary of demographic and income criteria that may factor into minimum qualifications and prioritization is included here:

* Area Median Income and Federal Poverty Level are two criteria that are included in the definition for Low-Income Households in RFA Section 1.7: “a household that has a taxable income for the preceding year not exceeding the higher of 80% of area median household income or 200% of the federal poverty level, adjusted for household size.” Low-Income Households meeting this definition are considered Qualifying Subscribers, and these criteria thus factor into multiple minimum qualifications and program priorities.
* Geographic and demographic data included in the Site Information Data Sheet will factor into scoring under the Highly Impacted Communities and Vulnerable Populations scoring category. In the Site Information Data Sheet are information requests including the Median Income of the city or town where the project site is located (If an Applicant’s city- or town-level data is unavailable from the source provided above, an Applicant is permitted to substitute county-level ACS 5-Year Estimates instead.), Environmental Health Disparities Ranking for the census tract where the project site is located, Entitlement/Non-Entitlement classification for the area where the project site is located, and Utility Fuel Mix for the utility that serves the project site. Applicants may include in their Equity Narrative other demographic or income data, or other information relevant to understanding the Application’s projected impact on Highly Impacted Communities and Vulnerable Populations.
* Per RFA Section 1.1 PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND, the definition for Highly Impacted Communities is inclusive of communities “located in census tracts that are fully or partially on "Indian country" as defined in 18 U.S.C. Sec. 1151”. This geographic consideration may be relevant to scoring for certain applications, particularly under the “Highly Impacted Communities & Vulnerable Populations” scoring category.

It is the responsibility of Applicants to fully read and understand the contents of the Request for Applications. There is additional detail surrounding prioritization and minimum qualifications included in RFA Sections 1.2, 1.3, and 4.

1. Are there restrictions on which affordable housing program the property participates? For example, would 80% area median income restricted units qualify?

Commerce has not established any minimum qualifications for this program that would require an affordable housing provider participant to also participate in any particular affordable housing program(s). Additionally, project sites may or may not be affordable housing properties.

It is worth noting that Housing Authorities are among those entities that could be considered a Qualifying Subscriber. Projects aiming to benefit affordable housing communities may also choose to incorporate Low-Income Households as Qualifying Subscribers. In the latter case, participation in income-restricted programs (such as certain affordable housing programs) may be relevant to income qualification for Low-Income Households. Please see the definition for Low-Income Household under RFA Section 1.7 DEFINITIONS. Please also see RFA Section 3.2 B EQUITY NARRATIVE concerning eligibility verification for Low-Income Households.

Q&A for Week of 11/04/2020 – 11/10/2020

1. I don't see schools listed on the applicants for the Solar Deployment Grant Program -Clean Energy Fund. Are schools able to and recommended to apply for funding with this grant?

The primary eligible applicants for this program are: 501(c)(3) Non-Profits, Federally Recognized Tribal Governments, Housing Authorities, and Retail Electric Utilities. If the school in question is one of these entities, it is a primary eligible applicant and can submit an application under this solicitation; otherwise, it is not a primary eligible applicant. Organizations that are not primary eligible applicants can still partner with primary eligible applicants to apply, assuming they meet all other minimum qualifications for this solicitation. Commerce’s Energy Efficiency & Solar Grants Program may be a better fit for schools wishing to pursue solar deployment – at the time of this writing, there is an active solicitation related to the Energy Efficiency aspect of that program; A solicitation for Solar Grants will be opened separately soon.

Please also see the response to Q&A Question #3, above.

Q&A for Week of 11/11/2020 – 11/17/2020

1. Am I to submit the completed application and copy the application summary, technical proposal, management proposal and cost proposal information into separate documents and attach them in order the RFA requests?

The RFA does not explicitly state that the numbered list of Application sections and attachments in RFA Section 3 APPLICATION CONTENTS need be submitted as separate documents, only that the Applications must “provide information in the same order as presented in this document with the same headings.” Commerce prefers that Application submissions be completed using the directions listed on page 1 of the Application Form (the Application Form is available on the program website listed in RFA Section 2.1 RFA Coordinator, and aligns with the instructions of the RFA), but may accept proposals with Application Sections 1-4 (Application Summary, Technical Proposal, Management Proposal, Cost Proposal) attached as separate documents and numbered in that order.

Applicants should also be familiar with RFA Sections 2.4 and 3 as they pertain to completion and submission of applications.

1. In addition 3.1 says the Application summary will be submitted in the application portal? This is the first I have heard of an application portal, all directions have stated completed applications with required attachments are to be emailed to cef@commerce.wa.gov.
Q: Is the Application summary to be covered in the application, included as separate document/attachment in email AND uploaded into the application portal?
Follow up Q: Where do I find the Application portal? Do I need to create an account to complete the application process?

Application submission for this program will be via email, as described in RFA Section 2.4 SUBMISSION OF APPLICATIONS. Applicants may disregard the previous contradictory reference to an “Application Portal” in RFA Section 3.1, and the RFA has been updated to remove that reference. Instead of preparing the information to be submitted via an application portal, Applicants should instead prepare the information listed in RFA Section 3.1 to be submitted as described in the instructions in RFA Section 2.4 SUBMISSION OF APPLICATIONS and in the Application Form.

1. Lastly in the RFA, page 14, 3.2 and page 15, 3.3 and page 16, 3.4 states “Applicant should use the provided application form to provide technical, management and cost proposal information.” Q: How would you like the application summary to be submitted? A. In application only B. In application with separate attachment with same information in application with additional submission in DOC application portal?

See the responses to Q&A Questions #79-80, above – Commerce prefers that the Application Summary information be submitted using the provided Application Form.

Q&A for Week of 11/18/2020 – 11/23/2020

1. Will additional attachments be accepted as part of the LICSD applications to provide additional project context? For example, letters of support, engineering drawings, photographs, etc.?

Optional additional attachments may be submitted along with the required and optional application elements listed in the RFA. However, Commerce is under no obligation to review optional additional attachments, and Commerce intends to instruct reviewers that “To the greatest extent possible, scores should be based on Commerce’s requested information and attachments, and any optional additional attachments included with the proposal should not affect the final score of an application.” This avoids incentivizing overly complex and lengthy applications, and keeps the review manageable for reviewers.

1. I’m rushing around but with COVID and the holidays, Dec. 1 is fast approaching. Any chance this deadline will be extended?

Commerce does not currently anticipate extending the deadline listed in RFA Section 2.2 ESTIMATED SCHEDULE OF PROCUREMENT ACTIVITIES. However, as stated in the RFA, COMMERCE reserves the right to revise the estimated schedule of procurement activities.