

Energy Retrofits for Public Buildings: Solar Solicitation Q&A

Submit all questions to the RFA Coordinator at energyretrofits@commerce.wa.gov. Commerce will post answers periodically through 8/13/2021. Questions must be submitted by 8/6/2021.

Questions Received through July 1, 2021

1) Q: We are a small Condominium Community of only twenty four units. We started out as apartments built in 1977 and converted to condos in 2009. I am reaching out to you because many of our owners want to buy electric cars but we are wondering if we could be considered for this grant. We have 6 parking lot lights, club house and Laundry room and an 18,000 gallon swimming pool we would like to take our west side of the pool hill and the club house roof and add panels to support this and maybe be able to install a few elect charging stations. Is this something we could be considered for?

A: No, a condominium or homeowners association is not an eligible entity.

2) Q: If a County applies to retro a building located within a town of less than 5,000 in population, does the 10kwa/33% criteria apply?

A: Yes, a project located in a qualifying small town or city qualifies for lower match and project size, regardless of whether the applicant is a small town or city government.

3) Q: Utilities are not specifically listed among the list of eligible applicants, unless they are included in the bucket of local agencies. I was wondering if a rooftop solar project for our utility offices would qualify for this grant program?

A: A municipal or public utility district qualifies. An investor-owned utility does not.

4) Q: What is the TOTAL State amount set aside for this program and what is (are) the funding source(s)?

A: \$3,465,810 is available for solar grants under this Request for Applications. The funding was authorized by the legislature in the Enacted 2020 supplemental budget ESSB 6248 Section 1023.

5) Q: Can you please put me on the distribution list for amendments and Q&A?

A: There is no distribution list for amendments and Q&A. Any amendments and Q&A will be posted on the program website at <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/growing-the-economy/energy/solar-grants/>.

- 6) Q: I am working with the Tulalip Tribes to build a housing project for homeless individuals and small families. The project is owned by the Tribes. The project is funded and scheduled to close/start construction in July. Would this project be eligible even if it has not been built yet? The design anticipated rooftop solar, but we currently don't have the funds to include.**

A: The building must have a certificate of occupancy by the application deadline of Aug. 19 to qualify as an existing building. Facilities which do not have a full year of energy consumption data, include all available history and modeling of projected annual energy use.

- 7) Q: Do you anticipate releasing a similar opportunity for community non-profits? If so, when might this happen? Is not, might you consider a community non-profit application in competition with this current announcement?**

A: Energy Retrofits for Public Buildings funding is authorized by the legislature solely for public entities completing projects for public facilities. Certain [Clean Energy Fund](#) programs may fund projects completed by non-profit organizations.

- 8) Q: I work with the Bremerton Housing Authority. We started to go down the road of installing Solar panels on 5 of our properties ranging from 20kw plus. Our properties have been studied and 5 have been cost justified. I would like to know more about this program and our eligibility to participate.**

A: Yes, as a public corporation, Bremerton Housing Authority is an eligible entity.

- 9) Q: Do nonprofit organizations that own their building qualify for this grant?**

A: Non-profit organizations are not an eligible entity.

- 10) Q: We are a Washington State designated Community Action Agency and private/nonprofit. Do you anticipate any funds for private agencies coming down the pike?**

A: See question 7.

- 11) Q: I am trying to determine if the Yakima Area Arboretum, which is ultimately owned by the City of Yakima, but solely managed, operated, financially supported, and maintained by a 501c3 non-profit organization (also known as the Yakima Area Arboretum) by agreement, would qualify for a Solar Grant?**

A: The facility and solar project must be owned by the eligible public entity. The project must also fulfill the grant objective to provide cost savings to a public entity from onsite energy production.

- 12) Q: Please add the contact information below to your roster so we receive RFA information.**

A: See question 5.

- 13) Q: Please send any amendments to this email address.**

A: See question 5.

14) Q: Saw the latest Dept of Commerce Solar Grant announcement, and wonder if ARPA funds can be used as any part of the 50% match?

A: Yes, federal funding through the American Rescue Plan Act may be used as match. The grantee is responsible for ensuring the use of Commerce grant funds meets any requirements imposed by other funding sources.

15) Q: I am interested whether a non-profit museum would be eligible for this grant funding.

A: See question 9.

16) Q: I would like to register to receive any notifications related to this solicitation.

A: See question 5.

17) Q: I logged into Zoom Grants and started an application. I am wondering why it says CLOSED as in "CLOSED Deadline 8/19/2021?"

A: The application has been opened and this message should no longer appear.

18) Q: Are public housing authority properties eligible for this grant?

A: Yes, public housing authorities are an eligible applicant. Properties must be owned by the eligible applicant.

19) Q: Can an applicant apply for the solar grant without a DES project consultant, ESCO, or Energy Consultant? Will the absence of an ESCO or Energy Consultant impact the evaluation of our application?

A: A DES project consultant, ESCO or Energy Consultant is not required. The energy production estimate must be completed by a qualified person according to industry standard practices, as evaluated by technical reviewers. Reviewers may also consider whether the applicant has a sufficient plan to select a qualified contractor to complete installation. If the project meets these standards, the absence of an ESCO or Energy Consultant will not impact evaluation.

20) Q: How does the Diverse Business Inclusion Plan fit within the Evaluation Weighting and Scoring?

A: The Diverse Business Inclusion Plan is informational only and does not impact scoring.

21) Q: What is the installation completion deadline?

A: Installations must be completed by June 2023, unless Commerce grants an exception. Contracts will extend at least one year from the completion date for the reporting period.

22) Q: I am the business development manager for Serenity House of Clallam County, a nonprofit organization that provides housing and shelter to low-income and homeless residents of Clallam County, Washington. With the increased heat, we are looking for a grant to install solar ventilation systems in our permanent supportive housing facilities for low-income chronically homeless adults. Would our organization be eligible for the Solar Grant Program?

A: See question 9.

23) Q: According to the Key Dates section, Awards will be announced in Nov 2021. What is the earliest expected date that funds will become available to be spent?

A: Funds are provided on a reimbursement basis. Costs incurred prior to the award date, estimated November 2021, cannot be reimbursed. Contracts are expected to be executed beginning two months following the award announcement (January 2022 or later), and any costs incurred prior to the contract execution are at the grantee's own risk.

24) Q: I see the link to RFA, but could you also post a link to the application form?

A: The link to the application form is in section 2.4 (page 9) of the RFA.

25) Q: We would like to apply but the grant says "public" buildings. So how would a tribally-owned building be eligible?

A: Buildings owned by a federally recognized tribal government are considered public buildings.

26) Q: Samish Water District, (formerly Whatcom County Water & Sewer District No. 12), is a special purpose district (RCW 36.96.010) located south of Bellingham, WA outside of the city's UGA boundary. They provide sewer service to county residents around Lake Samish, (approx. 450 connections), in Whatcom County and to another approximately 140 connections in Skagit County. They are hoping to retrofit their existing District Office building with solar, (see attached vicinity map). Are they eligible to apply for grant funding under this program? What would be their local match requirement, (33% or 50%)?

A: As a special purpose district, Samish Water District is an eligible entity. The project must be located in a Small Town or City to qualify for the match requirement of 33%, otherwise the requirement is 50%.

27) Q: Is a private medical building eligible for the grant? Sounds like only civil hospitals?

A: Facilities must be owned by an eligible public entity. Privately owned buildings are not eligible.

Questions Received at the Applicant Virtual Meeting, July 1, 2021

28) Q: Clarification... grants would not apply to new construction not yet started? Just existing buildings?

A: Yes, project must be net metered with existing facilities. An existing facility is defined as a facility that has a certificate of occupancy by the application deadline of Aug. 19, 2021.

29) Q: Do public housing authorities qualify as a public entities?

A: See question 18.

30) Q: (Relating to the 50 year or less payback requirement) How does that work when the life expectancy of solar panels is 20 to 25 years?

A: The simple payback is a calculated value based on the projected annual energy production multiplied by the statewide average electricity rate identified in the RFA. The actual financial performance of the project may vary. The project is not required to be in service for 50 years.

31) Q: Can you please expand on the specific scoring for how much a higher matching amount can help a project? How much is maximum and minimum points for matching funds?

A: Projects which meet the minimum requirement (either 33% or 50%) will receive a score of 0 or 1. Projects which provide 75% or more match will receive the maximum of 30 points. Projects providing between 50% and 75% will be calculated using a linear formula. For projects that qualify for the lower match requirement, the linear formula will be different so they will receive higher points for the same match percentage than other projects, up to 75%.

32) Q: For the "made in WA" does that require all components or which ones? Is that all 10 points or none?

A: Projects which use Made in Washington modules combined with other out of state equipment will receive 5 points. Projects which use Made in Washington modules and inverters or another major component will receive up to 10 points, depending on the component.

33) Q: Are there plans to have a supportive grant process later on for the solar panel replacements or is it the hope that the cities will just pick up the cost?

A: This grant program does not include funding for replacement costs at the end of the equipment life.

34) Q: Will there be a requirement to insure proper/safe disposal methods are used at end of life?

A: That is not a requirement of this grant program.

35) Q: Are there solar panel companies that Commerce would like the applicants to use?

A: The only preference is for equipment manufactured in Washington. There is no preference for specific manufacturing companies of other vendors.

36) Q: Is this program funding available annually?

A: The funding is provided under the biennial capital budget, and additional funding is dependent on future appropriation by the legislature. The current funding opportunity is using funds appropriated for the 2019-21 biennium. The 2021-23 biennium budget appropriates an additional \$1 million for solar grants, which will be awarded in a future competitive process.

37) Q: Does paying for a warranty count toward the costs?

A: Extended warranties are not an eligible cost.

38) Q: If an ESCO contractor has already been selected, should the local government or contractor create the ZoomGrants account to submit the application?

A: The local government or eligible applicant should create a ZoomGrants account. The applicant may invite others to collaborate on the application with additional ZoomGrants accounts.

39) Q: If working with an ESCO, who should be listed as contractor and/or performing assessment? The ESCO? Subcontractor? OK to list both?

A: The person (or people) completing the energy production estimate should be listed, regardless of their affiliation. If an ESCO and an installation contractor have been selected, please list both.

40) Q: What's the timeline with the WTO protest on subsidizing WA made panels?

A: The timeline is unknown. If a judgement is made during the review period, Commerce will decide how to proceed at that point.

41) Q: For state agencies, does the match requirement mean we need to come up with the other 50% of project cost from some other source that's not our budget, like federal/private grants?

A: Yes, state agencies budgets are a state source, so state agencies need to provide match from other sources.

42) Q: For utility bills do you require actual utility bills or is a spreadsheet, e.g. Excel file, ok?

A: Provide actual utility bills. A single utility bill that includes a summary of annual usage, or bills from the beginning and end of the period which show meter readings consistent with the reported annual usage are sufficient. A summary Excel file in addition to bills is helpful but not required.

43) Q: Is virtual net-metering allowed, if we wanted to use the grant for a low-income community solar project?

A: The questioner was invited to submit additional information about the proposed net metering arrangement.

44) Q: Are these projects supposed to completely replace traditional electricity in a building? Or is the solar meant to supplement the electricity?

A: Solar projects must be net metered with the serving utility, so buildings will maintain a connection to the electrical grid. Commerce does not have a preference for the percentage of electricity usage offset by the solar production. If a project produces more than 100% of the energy used by the connected meter on an annual basis, the amount beyond the annual usage would not be compensated, and therefore will be excluded from the simple payback calculation.

45) Q: If working with an ESCO and separate solar subcontractor, whose diverse business plan do we submit? The ESCO? The sub? Both?

A: All contractors and subcontractors should be included in the diverse business inclusion plan.

46) Q: How close are the grant scores usually? Are winners and losers separated by a point? Ten points? What percentage of applicants have been funded previously?

A: In the previous round, 46 applications were received. Of those, 17 were disqualified, 29 were evaluated, and 11 were funded. Six projects that were not funded received scores within 5 points of the lowest scoring funded project. The scoring for this RFA has changed significantly, so results are not directly comparable.

47) Q: Diverse plan- We are required to go out to bid for public works projects so we won't know %s of DBE will be used- how do we fill out the form?

A: Please use a goal or estimate, and note this on the form.

48) Q: Are WA Special Purpose Districts eligible to apply?

A: See question 26.

49) Q: Will one engineer estimate work for quotes?

A: Applicants are encouraged to provide the best supporting information available. The evaluation team(s) may adjust the applicant's reported project costs for calculating scores if they determine such information is not based on relevant best practices or compliant with the RFA. If the cost estimate cannot be reasonably verified, applicants may receive no points in cost-related categories or the project may be considered unfeasible and not recommended.

50) Q: Are 501(c)3's that serve as trustee agencies for the state eligible for this grant?

A: Generally, 501(c)3s are not eligible. This party is invited to submit additional information regarding their governance structure so we can confirm eligibility.

51) Q: We're a special purpose district and own a 10,000 sf office bldg. Do we qualify for a minimum project size of 20kW AC or 10kW AC?

A: See question 26.

52) Q: Are these projects eligible for the 26% federal tax credit?

A: Generally, the eligible entities for this grant do not qualify for federal tax credits. Third-party owned systems are not eligible for this grant; the system must be owned by a public entity.

53) Q: Are there extra points in the scoring for using WMBE (Women-Owned or Minority-Owned Business Enterprise) firms?

A: See question 20.

54) Q: Is there a list of previous awards with more detail of projects; size of the facility, annual energy consumption data, solar vendor used, etc?

A: The list of previous awardees with amount of award is posted on the website. Additional information can be requested in writing (which would be considered a public records request).

55) Q: What type of solar projects are better suited to Commerce's Clean Energy Fund?

A: Projects which are eligible for this grant program are encouraged to apply. More information about the Clean Energy Fund programs may be found on the website.

56) Q: We are a tribe with a federally negotiated indirect rate that we charge for grants that covers admin costs, etc. Is an indirect rate allowed?

A: Yes, a reasonable indirect rate can be included in eligible project costs. Although these are state funds, a federally negotiated rate may be used as a benchmark for a reasonable rate. Including these costs will result

in a lower score on payback period and cost per watt, although the score for match funding may be higher if grantee is able to provide more match when including indirect costs.

57) Q: Please confirm: Matching monies must come from additional state sources, not out-of-pocket?

A: Match must be provided from non-state sources. State agencies cannot use operating or capital budget funds for match. Non-state entities may use local funds ("out of pocket").

58) Q: What if the contractor is helping their client apply for other grants that will not be awarded till after the commerce grant has been awarded? Will it still count as the match?

A: Applicants can apply for funding simultaneously. Applicants must receive their non-state match funding within 12 months of receipt of their award letter. A six-month extension may be provided on a case-by-case basis. Successful applicants that secure less than proposed in their application will have the award reduced based on the secured match amount.

59) Q: What if the amount of small towns and cities applying for grants surpasses the set aside for small cities and towns? Will they still be eligible for the amount of money they applied for if they have a good application?

A: This RFA does not include a carve-out for small towns and cities.

Questions Received through July 9, 2021

60) Q: Since conservation districts are special purpose districts and subdivisions of state government, would our internal funds be classified as state funds or could they be used as match to the grant funding?

A: Funding from the state capital budget or the state operating budget is considered state funds. If district funds are from those sources, they would not be eligible to be used as match funding.

61) Q: Did you record the July 1 Solar - Virtual Meeting?

A: Yes, the Pre-application Virtual Meetings are being recorded, and will be uploaded to the website: www.commerce.wa.gov/growing-the-economy/energy/solar-grants.

62) Q: WSF is a State agency. We have no other sources of funds other than our Capital budgets or operating funds. Can we use other federal funds? Does this mean we cannot apply?

A: Federal funds are non-state funds and can be used to meet match requirements (funds from this grant are from the state capital budget). State capital budget and state operating budgets cannot be used to meet match requirements. Projects must meet minimum qualifications to be considered. Projects located in Small Cities and Towns (see definition) or projects of Tribal governments must provide 33% of the total project cost (leverage ratio of 1:2) from other, non-state sources. All others must provide 50% of the total project cost (leverage ratio of 1:1) from other, non-state sources.

63) Q: In the Project Documents section, you request "Project scope for all work to be completed under this grant." How detailed would you like this to be? We will already have a very detailed description in the document uploaded to satisfy "Proposals, quotes, or other documentation to support project budget." We also give the equipment list elsewhere. Is one to two sentences describing a rooftop solar PV project (modules, inverter, utility disconnect) sufficient? Do you want the equipment list here again? Is the

purpose of this question to ensure that grant funds are not being used on non-eligible scope such as roofing or energy storage?

A: The project scope will assist in determining eligible scope, assessing feasibility and cost-effectiveness, and if the project is awarded, will form the basis of the contract scope. The scope can repeat the equipment list but does not need to. The scope may draw from proposals or quotes submitted as well. In addition to installation of modules and inverters, other elements of the scope may include design and engineering, permitting, related electrical work, and commissioning.

64) Q: Does the Commerce Dept prohibit the same entity from submitting multiple applications? Is it preferable to group multiple projects under the same application instead?

A: Applicants may submit unlimited applications. No entity will receive more than \$350,000 across all projects, although submitted applications can request more than the limit (if all applications are selected, the award amount for one or more of the projects would be reduced). Each application should represent a single project, defined as a solar electric system installed at a single location and either interconnected with a single meter or installed on a single building. Applications should be submitted by the qualifying entity.

65) Q: We are thinking about partnering with one or more of the four sovereign tribes that we serve power to in order to apply for this grant. What we'd propose is to install the solar array on the Tribe's tribal center or other suitable building that meets your requirement of being an existing building that's owned by the tribe, or potentially one of our buildings that meet the same criteria, only they are publicly owned by us. Then, rather than connect the electrical output from the solar array through an electrical panel in the building and behind the utility meter so that the solar system is configure for net-metering, we connect the electrical output on to our system on the utility's side of the meter, bypassing the revenue meter. We'd then configure the system for virtual net-metering, enrolling the Tribe's low-income and vulnerable tribal members in the virtual net-metering scheme. Essentially creating a low income community solar project funded by a mixture of tribal funds and in kind contributes, District funds and in kind contributions, and Department of Commerce SOLAR 2021 grant. Is something like what I just described allowed under this grant, or does it have to net-meter directly into the building that the solar system is constructed on?

A: Virtual net energy metering (VNEM) may be considered net-metering under this grant, provided the utility has a VNEM policy that is substantially similar to net metering policies. The project must meet all other grant requirements, including the grant objective:

"The primary purpose of grants funded under this solicitation must be to install net-metered solar photovoltaic (PV) systems connected to publicly-owned facilities, which result in cost savings for a public entity from onsite energy production."

Questions Received through July 15, 2021

66) Q: I have been looking for "made in washington" modules and inverters. I have found two companies: SilFab Solar of Bellingham and Magnum Energy of Everett. I expect there must be more options---can you provide a list of the "made in washington" companies that produce these?

A: Department of Commerce does not maintain a list of Washington-manufactured equipment.

67) Q: A client of ours is looking to install solar PV on a building addition. The standalone addition will be adjacent to an existing building that already has a certificate of occupancy. The addition itself will NOT have a certificate of occupancy by the application deadline. Is this project eligible for a solar grant if we were to reference the certificate of occupancy of the existing building since it's located at the same site?

A: A new addition to an existing building is considered new construction.

68) Q: I am working with a senior center which has a large building open to the public. They are really interested in the solar grant program, but their structure is a nonprofit organization (501-c-3), although I know that other senior centers are part of cities. In this case, would they be eligible to apply for this grant? If not, are there other solar retrofit grant opportunities for nonprofit agencies?

A: No, this entity is not eligible. See questions 7 and 9.

69) Q: If my agency were to apply for this grant, we would meet the match requirement by simultaneously applying for federal/private grants. My question is, how specific do we need to be on where our match funds will come from? We would be able to specify grants we will seek and projected amounts, but obviously it would be speculative. We want to confirm if that would be acceptable before deciding to pursue this grant.

A: You may reference funding that is not secured (see question 58) in your budget. Please specify the expected source of matching funds, and provide notes on the status and timeline of unsecured funding sources in the budget narrative.

70) Q: I am a grant writer for the South Fork Valley Community Association in Whatcom County, and the Association and the County are interested in proposing to the "Energy Retrofits for Public Buildings" RFA. The Community Hall is owned by the County. Currently, the Association pays the electric bills. In order to be eligible to propose, would the Association and the County have to rewrite the Memorandum of Understanding that pertains to use of the building such that the County becomes responsible for the electric bills? If so, what would be the timeframe for amending the memorandum, such that the application (from the County) would be eligible for review?

A: The project must meet the grant objective: "The primary purpose of grants funded under this solicitation must be to install net-metered solar photovoltaic (PV) systems connected to publicly-owned facilities, which result in cost savings for a public entity from onsite energy production."

Cost savings do not need to be directly from the public entity's energy bills, but they must be measurable and clearly accruing to the public entity. Proposed changes do not need to be completed prior to the grant award to be considered, but they must be clearly explained in the application.

71) Q: Are we eligible to go after the solar grant since we were awarded the energy efficiency grant? I know they are both under Energy Retrofits program so I'm not sure if we're only allowed to participate in one.

A: Applicants who have been awarded grants under this program, whether energy efficiency or solar, are eligible to apply. Additionally, awards received for energy efficiency projects are not counted as previous awards for evaluation under this RFA, only solar awards.

72) Q: See if there is a buy American and/or Davis Bacon wage requirement and if so can they provide us the wage package since they will be using Federal funds?

A: No federal funds are currently being awarded. State prevailing wage requirements do apply. See RFA section 4.7, as well as Exhibit D Sample Terms and Conditions.

73) Q: Several places in Zoom grants, it says "Minimum qualification – must be less than 100 kW..." but the RFA says "The maximum project size is 100kW AC." Can you clarify?

A: The minimum qualifications refer to conditions which must be met in order for the project to process to scoring. These are listed in RFA section 1.3. One of these minimum qualifications is a maximum project size of 100kW AC. The Zoom Grants application questions specify that the project size must be less than 100kW, consistent with the RFA minimum requirements.

74) Q: The building is located adjacent to the District's primary sewer treatment facility and shares a PSE meter with that facility. When soliciting solar proposals from contractors, the District has been providing electrical, horsepower, and runtime information so that the contractors can make approximate calculations of the power usage at the treatment facility. They then subtract that estimated treatment facility usage from the PSE billings to arrive at an estimate of the power usage at the District Office.

Absent separate meters for the two facilities, the only way to arrive at more accurate allocations would be to install energy monitors (CT monitors) on site that would allow the District to actually measure real time power consumption at the plant. However, the District would not be able to implement this type of energy monitoring before the August 19th application submission deadline for this solar grant program.

The grant application requires the submission of actual PSE billings to verify usage. Since the District will only have billings that show combined usage for the two facilities, would the Grant Program accept copies of actual billings coupled with support calculations, (as described in the second paragraph), that estimate the power usage for the District Office where the solar system will be installed? If the answer is "yes" to Question #1, will the Grant Program require the District to implement an energy monitoring program after the fact to verify usage in the event the District's project is awarded grant money?

A: Utility bills for the meter will be sufficient. The usage of the two facilities do not need to be separated, since they are connected to the same utility meter. Our primary concern with utility usage for the solar program is to verify that all solar production will receive net metering credits, i.e. that the facility uses more energy than the proposed solar project will produce on an annual basis. The only situation where we would need to see more detailed energy consumption than the meter level would be if the solar project proposed to install an additional meter, and in that case, estimates of the consumption for the new meter, in addition to available utility bills, would be sufficient.

Questions Received at the Applicant Virtual Meeting, July 14, 2021

75) Q: The application asks if you have completed a structural review, but the guidelines aren't clear on the requirements. Is a stamped structural engineering review required? Does it impact the project scoring?

No, stamped structural engineering review is not required at the time of application. Any structural engineering that has been completed should be described. Initial assessments by experienced professionals, even if they are not structural engineers, can be included as well (please note qualifications clearly, and assessments by non-engineers will be considered preliminary). If any risk factors have been identified, applicants should consider additional contingency funding and other mitigations.

Answers to questions about structural engineering are not scored directly. Reviewers will look for major unaddressed risk factors and consider these when making final recommendations.

76) Q: When does the grant project need to be completed?

A: Installations need to be completed within 18 months of the contract execution (expected January 2022), and projects must complete at least 12 months of measurement and verification. Longer timelines may be considered on a case-by-case basis, and should be requested in the application.

77) Q: Please confirm that transit agencies are able to apply. We are a special benefit district - Island County Public Transportation Benefit Area, d/b/a Island Transit, a municipal corporation.

A: Yes, municipal corporations such as public transportation benefit areas are eligible.

78) Q: Can some of our match come from selling community solar shares?

A: Yes, funding from community solar shares would be eligible as match funding, but only if it is secured prior to construction. Additionally, the project must meet the grant objective: "The primary purpose of grants funded under this solicitation must be to install net-metered solar photovoltaic (PV) systems connected to publicly-owned facilities, which result in cost savings for a public entity from onsite energy production."

79) Q: Would facility include our city's waste water treatment plant which has a brand new roof?

A: Yes, if the wastewater treatment plant is owned by the public entity, it is an eligible facility.

80) Q: Would you please elaborate just a bit on net metering? I just hope to be sure we share the same definition.

A: According to RCW 80.60.010 "'Net metering' means measuring the difference between the electricity supplied by an electric utility and the excess electricity generated by a customer-generator's net metering system over the applicable billing period."

For the purposes of this grant, projects must also comply with utility net metering policies, and if they do not, they may not be considered net metered. Virtual net energy metering may be considered net metering, as described in question 65.

81) Q: Our building is owned by the county (we are a community association), but we pay the electric bills. Is this arrangement still eligible?

See question 70.

82) Q: 50% or 33% match from a County facility operated by a [small!] community association?

A: If the facility is located in a Small City or Town (see definition in RFA Section 1.7) the project is eligible for the reduced match requirement of 33%. The applicant does not need to be a Small City or Town government to qualify.

83) Q: Could that mean that a County building located in a small city qualifies for the 33% match?

A: Yes, see question 82.

84) Q: Will USDA grants qualify as match?

A: Yes, USDA grants are considered non-state funding and would likely qualify as match (we would need to know the specific program to confirm there are no other restrictions that would apply).

85) Q: Are tribally designated housing entities established as an instrumentality of a tribe eligible as part of a recognized Tribal government?

A: If the entity is a department within a qualifying tribe or a tribal housing authority, then yes. If the entity is organized as a separate 501(c)3 non-profit, then we may need to examine the governance in additional detail.

86) Q: Do publicly owned buildings include housing owned by an eligible public entity?

A: Yes.

87) Q: Can the total KW of solar proposed by an applicant over multiple applications exceed 100 KW AC and the total cost of the projects exceed \$350,000 as long as the total award sought be an applicant does not exceed \$350,000?

A: Yes. You may also submit award requests totaling more than \$350,000, but only \$350,000 will be awarded.

Please also keep in mind the definition of a project in section 1.3: "A project is defined as a solar electric system installed at a single location and either interconnected with a single meter or installed on a single building. Each project must be submitted on a separate application."

A project may not be split into multiple applications solely for the purpose of avoiding the 100kW AC size limit.

88) Q: How does the reduced required cost leverage ratio for Small Cities and Towns and Tribal Governments (leverage ratio of 1:2 compared to 1:1 for other applicants) affect scoring under the Leveraging Ratio factor for Small Cities and Towns and Tribal Governments?

A: See question 31.

89) Q: Is there any particular formula or approach you apply for determining how many of the 30 points an application will receive under the leveraging ratio category? If so, what is that formula or approach?

A: See question 31.

90) Q: Is there any particular formula or approach you apply for determining how many of the 30 points an application will receive under the simple payback category? If so, what is that formula or approach?

A: This answer was updated 8/10. Projects with a 50 year payback will receive 0 points, and project with a payback of 10 years or less will receive 30 points. Paybacks between 10 and 50 years payback will be determined using a linear formula.

91) Q: Is there any particular formula or approach you apply for determining how many of the 10 points an application will receive under the cost per watt category? If so, what is that formula or approach?

A: *This formula will depend on the project costs in the applications received. The formula will be linear, with the highest score given to the lowest cost proposal and the lowest score given the highest cost proposal. However, Commerce may exclude very high or very low costs when developing the formula, and projects with these costs would receive the minimum or maximum score.*

92) Q: Is the cost savings for demand reduction included in the simple payback?

A: *No, any savings from demand charges will not be included in calculating the simple payback. Simple payback is calculated as the total project cost (excluding contingency) divided by the annual value of energy produced. The value of energy produced is calculated as the annual kWh production multiplied by the statewide average electricity rate of \$0.08275.*

93) Q: If the project is ground mounted, is fencing an eligible expense?

A: *Fencing may be an eligible expense if it is required to complete the solar project (for example, if it is required to receive an electrical permit). Keep in mind that additional costs will increase your project costs, which may decrease payback and cost per watt scores, although they may also increase the leverage score.*

94) Q: Please confirm whether a housing authority is eligible.

A: *Yes, a public housing authority is an eligible entity.*

95) Q: If we are going out for bid, we may not know for sure where the final components will be manufactured? Is that a problem in the scoring section?

A: *If you receive points for using made in Washington equipment, then your project must use made in Washington components, and you would need to specify them in your procurement. If you do not indicate made in Washington components, you do not need to specify place of manufacture.*

96) Q: Can an applicant apply for the solar grant without an ESCO (Energy Services Company), or Energy Consultant? Will the absence of an ESCO or Energy Consultant impact the evaluation of our application? We've had applications rejected in the past for not using one, and instead using the solar installer-provided documents for the required documents.

A: *See question 19. Although ESCOs were not required in previous rounds, the application has changed from previous rounds to better accommodate projects that have not contracted with an ESCO. Please review the list of required attachments carefully and submit any questions prior to the Q&A deadline to ensure you understand the requirements.*

97) Q: Is 1 year of M&V required, or will Energy Monitoring be sufficient?

A: *The project must report on the first year of energy production and savings, by submitting documentation from a monitoring system and utility bills. The applicant does not need to contract with a company to provide measurement and verification services if they have the capacity to provide the required documentation in-house.*

98) Q: Is there the opportunity to view a winning application (or a project case study) from the previous round, or would those not be comparable enough to the selection criteria used this round?

A: *Winning applications are not posted publicly, but may be available through a public records request (submit the request to energyretrofits@commerce.wa.gov). The selection criteria have changed, so past projects are not directly comparable.*

99) Q: **If we don't know who the contractor will be yet, it will be hard to submit the contractor certification document. Is that a problem?**

A: *The Contractor Certification (Exhibit C) refers to the applicant.*

100) Q: **Is the maximum match still 75%, even for entities that qualify for the 33% minimum?**

A: *See question 31. To clarify, applicants may provide more than 75% match, but will not receive additional points for doing so.*

101) Q: **Does "shading" mean IF there is something that would obstruct the sun? What if there isn't anything in the way all day?**

A: *Projects with minimal to no shading must still submit a shading report as described in the RFA (either onsite measurements or modeled shading).*

102) Q: **So is the PV Watts report sufficient?**

A: *No, the PV Watts needs to be submitted in conjunction with onsite shading measurements, or remote assessments showing the equivalent data of both onsite shading measurements and PV Watts.*

Questions Received through July 23, 2021

103) Q: **What qualification(s) is required by the person(s) completing the energy production estimates and what documentation needs to be provided?**

A: *There are no specific qualifications required of the person completing the energy production estimates. The reviewer team will consider the qualifications when determining the reasonableness of the solar production estimates, and if the person is considered underqualified, they may adjust the estimates accordingly when scoring the application. The qualifications document should include information such as certifications, relevant education, years of experience and/or number of similar projects completed. This does not need to be a resume, although it can be.*

104) Q: **If we hypothetically had a customer who was granted funds for a project which, after extension testing, was determined to be no longer feasible due to unforeseen site conditions, would the failure of this project impact this public entity or lower their score on future grant applications?**

A: *Past grant performance on other projects does not impact project scoring.*

105) Q: **Under Number 7 and Number 8 of the Solar Grant Application: If the client is using an ESCO do they put the ESCO or the subcontractor to the ESCO?**

A: *See question 39.*

106) Q: Under Project Costs: Item B description Contingency budget, is this the client contingency budget? We were under the Impression that Contingency Funds were not to be allowed as a part of the overall costs?

A: You are correct, contingency funds are not eligible project costs. The contingency budget is listed here to ensure it is not included in the Eligible Project Costs category, and to assist the evaluation team in assessing project feasibility.

107) Q: Under Proposal Quotes or other documentation to support the budget: Is this a request for a copy of our Guaranteed Maximum Construction costs table with all of the break outs or is a copy of the Energy Services Proposal preferred?

A: For ESCO projects, the Energy Services Proposal is preferred for this attachment.

Questions Received through July 30, 2021

108) Q: In looking through the scoring process, I can see that it could make a big difference in whether we get any funding, if we can come up with a 75% match rather than a 50% match. Would it be better to just list our district as the source of most of the 75% match, regardless of whether we may apply for additional grants to help us with the match, even though there is commitment to following through with 75% match if we are not successful at raising other funding sources? Or is their value in listing all other potential match funding sources?

A: The source of the match is not scored (ineligible funding sources may be excluded when evaluating minimum qualifications and scoring). If selected, grantees must provide the match ratio listed in the application in order to receive an award. If desired, applicants may provide additional information in the narrative about funding sources and plans for providing match if pending sources are not secured.

109) Q: Do you know if this project has any addendums out yet? Do you keep track of a plan holders list?

A: The RFA has not issued any amendments. There is no plan holders or bidders list.

Questions Received through August 6, 2021

110) Q: Commerce does not appear to be providing any guidance regarding solar panel or inverter manufacturers located in Washington State. Silfab manufactures solar panels in Washington. The panels they manufacture in this state are considered residential sized and scaled products. However, Silfab does manufacture commercial solar panels in Canada. If a grant application includes Silfab's commercial products that aren't actually manufactured in Washington, would those be considered Made in WA because Silfab, as a company, has other solar panel manufacturing operations in this state?

A: No, the equipment installed for the project must be manufactured in Washington state.

111) Q: Sunmodo is a solar racking manufacturer based in Vancouver, WA. However, it doesn't appear their products are made in WA. Would their racking be considered Made in WA? If a project used Sunmodo racking but not any Made in WA panels or inverters, would any points be received?

A: See question 110. If a project includes racking Made in Washington, but not modules or inverters, points would be awarded. However, in this case the racking is not Made in Washington so it would not be awarded points.

112) Q: Can you please confirm that the Energy Retrofits for Public Buildings grant uses the same methodology as the LICSD grant in defining “Made in Washington materials”? Not all Silfab panels are manufactured in Washington, and we are trying to determine whether Commerce has verified the exact SKU of Silfab panels that are made in Washington or if they are using some other methodology to confirm that the commitments made in grant applications are being followed through. We do not want to be put into a position where we are bidding panels manufactured in Washington against panels that are manufactured elsewhere by a Washington-based company.

A: See question 110. Grantees will be contractually obligated to install Made in Washington equipment if they are awarded funding based on using such equipment.

113) Q: If we choose a contractor for this project and submit that information on the application, are we required to complete the project with that contractor if our grant is successful? To what extent can we change the contractor if we re-evaluate the project after the application has been submitted?

A: You may change the contractor after the award. If the contractor selection is not final, you may note that in your application. You are not required to select a contractor prior to award.

114) Q: Can we apply for a grant of a particular size, then downsize it and do a smaller project if we fail to raise our entire match amount locally? Or do we need to guarantee that we have cash on hand in order to apply for a particular sized grant?

A: If a grantee is not able to provide the match specified in the application, they may request a change in the project scope of work. However, the project will be rescored and may not be awarded funding if the new project would not have been selected under the original evaluation.

115) Q: Can you please clarify what is needed for site photos? Do you need photos of our entire complex, or just where the solar panels and key components will go? Would a Google Earth photo suffice?

A: Please include photos of the rooftop or ground-mount location, and photos looking to the south, east, and west from the proposed location, showing any potential shading obstructions (or lack of obstructions). Photos of the electrical panel, meter, and proposed inverter location may also be helpful but not required in every case. An aerial image is helpful but not sufficient. Photos will be used to verify energy production estimates, establish reasonable project costs, and establish project feasibility.

116) Q: Is it mandatory to have a licensed engineer review the project prior to submittal of the application? To what extent would not having a review done impact the scoring of the application.

A: See question 75.

117) Q: In the grant’s evaluation criteria, Commerce awards up to 30 points for the leveraging ratio: “The amount of match funding provided beyond the minimum requirement (see section 1.3 of this RFA). Other state funds may be considered for this category. Maximum points will be awarded to projects which provide a match of 75% of total project cost or greater. Contingency funds are excluded from the total project cost for the purpose of calculating match.” I am wondering how the scoring for this section interacts with the lower 33% minimum requirement for small cities and towns. Do projects in small cities and towns also need to match 75% of total project costs to be awarded maximum points, or do they have a lower benchmark? If a project in Palouse matches 50% would it be awarded more points under this section than a project in Seattle that matches 50%?

A: See Question 31.

118) Q: Per Exhibit B, Diverse Business Inclusion Plan, three questions emerge: Is a Federally Recognized Tribe considered to be a State Certified Minority Business?

A: A business must be certified by the Office of Minority and Women's Business Enterprises. A Tribal Government would likely not qualify as it is a government entity, not a "for profit". Tribal businesses may qualify. If a business is not currently certified, but you reasonably believe they meet the requirements and can become certified, they may be included on the form. See <https://omwbe.wa.gov/certification> for more information.

119) Q: Is a Tribal Government considered a "firm"?

A: For the purposes of Exhibit B, the Tribal Government is not a firm.

120) Q: Is a Tribal Government considered a Small Business (we have a StateWide Vendor number and only 70 employees)?

A: For the purposes of Exhibit B, the Tribal Government is not a Small Business.

121) Q: We wanted to try and apply for the solar grant program, not really sure how it works as we have never done it before or what we needed to fill out and turn in.

A: Please review the Request for Applications (RFA), Q&A, and pre-application meetings posted at <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/growing-the-economy/energy/solar-grants/>. The RFA provides detailed guidelines and instructions for how to apply. The application is filled out and submitted online, and the link is listed in the RFA.

122) Q: Can an entity use a utility provided excel document that shows monthly kwh and kw instead of the raw utility data? Also, if it is a campus setting, can we use a utility grade building level submeter to show the energy consumption of the building instead of the entire campus raw utility bills?

A: Please provide a utility bill for the meter showing one year of electricity use. Additional summary information or building-level information may be helpful but is not required nor sufficient on its own. The primary purpose of collecting utility bills is to verify that the building will receive all net metering credits produced by the project.

123) Q: Just wanted to clarify, on Exhibit C under the documents tab, that form is to be filled out directly by the contractor and not from the municipality.

A: Exhibit C should be filled out by the applicant, i.e. the municipality.

124) Q: How is "annual value of energy produced" defined? It is not in Section 1.7 DEFINITIONS. What is the calculation used to determine "annual value of energy produced"? Is "annual value of energy produced" measured in kW? Is "annual value of energy produced" synonymous with DC system capacity?

A: Annual value of energy produced is the production estimate in kWh (reported in application question 14) multiplied by the statewide average electricity rate. It is measured in dollars.

Update 8/10/2021

Answer to question 90 was corrected.

The deadline for questions was August 6, 2021. Questions received after this date will not be answered.

If you are experiencing technical issues with ZoomGrants, please review ZoomGrants help or email Questions@ZoomGrants.com.