

Call for Grant Applications for:

**Residential Renewable Energy Subsidy Program-
Cook County Sun and Save Program Administrator**

Issued by:

Cook County Department of Environment and Sustainability (DES)

**American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funded
Coronavirus State and Local Federal Relief Funding (SLFRF) Program**

Date Issued: Thursday, September 8, 2022

Submission Due Date: Friday, September 30, 2022, 5:00pm CDT

Anticipated Term: December 2022 through August 2026

Information Session: A virtual information session will be held on Friday, September 16 from 11:00am to 12:00pm CDT. Please register by clicking [here](#). Registrants will receive an email confirmation and calendar invite after registration is complete.

Applicant Questions Due Date: All questions must be received by 5:00pm CDT on Tuesday, September 20, 2022. Questions can be emailed to environment@cookcountyil.gov. Questions and responses will be posted online by Friday, September 23, 2022 at <https://www.cookcountyil.gov/service/solar-energy>

Submission Instructions: All responses must be submitted no later than Friday, September 30, 2022, by 5:00pm CDT. All applications must be submitted electronically. Late submissions will not be considered. To submit your response, please complete the Grant Application in its entirety and email a completed version and all required attachments to environment@cookcountyil.gov

Contact: environment@cookcountyil.gov

I. Scope of Services

a. Funding Source

The Cook County Department of Environment and Sustainability (DES) is providing funding under the U.S. Department of Treasury's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) program, to support residents and those providing

services to residents to foster resiliency and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Cook County Government has allocated \$3,085,155 of ARPA funds to support a Residential Renewable Energy Subsidy program. Award recipients of ARPA funding are responsible for adhering to Federal award guidelines in the Uniform Guidance, a set of federal rules including administrative requirements, cost principles, and audit guidelines that apply to federal money.

b. Background

Cook County is located in the upper northeastern section of the State of Illinois and contains more than 800 local governmental units within its boundaries. With a population of approximately 5.3 million people, it is the second most populous county in the nation. Cook County contains over 130 municipalities, the largest being the City of Chicago which is the County seat and where the County's central offices are located. The City of Chicago and the suburban municipalities account for approximately 85% of Cook County's 946 square miles. The County's Department of Environment and Sustainability fosters healthy, resilient and thriving communities by improving the quality of life, protecting the natural environment, and promoting sustainability and environmental justice for all Cook County residents and stakeholders and will oversee the Cook County Sun and Save Residential Renewable Energy Subsidy program. This program will be referred to as Cook County Sun and Save throughout this document and for marketing purposes.

As the cost of solar energy continues to decrease, there are huge benefits to be realized from the installation of solar panels for homeowners, including the lower cost of utility bills over the lifetime of the solar system. However, low-and moderate-income residents have had issues accessing these resources due to lack of capital, not qualifying for federal tax credits and unfamiliarity with available renewable energy resources. Yet these residents have the most to gain from reducing their energy burden and their utility bills through installing solar on their homes. The goal of this program is to directly address these issues and reach more low-and moderate-income residents throughout Cook County in both the city of Chicago and suburban Cook, making solar installations at their homes more feasible. This program aims to reduce barriers to clean energy for residents, reducing their energy burden and their utility bills over the lifetime of the solar installations, as well as helping to reduce our region's carbon emissions and mitigate climate change.

c. Program Description

Under the Cook County Sun and Save Program, Cook County will offer financial support for residential renewable energy installations. This program will cover the cost of the installation for residents who are at or below 120% Area Median Income (AMI)—reaching income-qualified households throughout both the suburbs and the city of Chicago. Eligibility will be based on income thresholds, with understanding that the IL Solar for All program services residents at or below 80% AMI. By targeting Cook County households who are at or below 120% AMI, this program will benefit a population that has disproportionately experienced significant negative economic impacts as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additional program details to be solidified with the selected Program Administrator. Cook County will leverage this program to

assess the ability to effectively transition to a more permanent program structure once the pilot is complete if other funding sources are secured.

The overarching goals of the Cook County Sun and Save program are:

- Provide residential solar installations for income-qualified Cook County residents to reduce utility costs burden and increase clean energy within Cook County
- Provide minor structural improvements for income-qualified Cook County residents where necessary for the solar installation to have the greatest impact on utility bills and cost burden
- Create a replicable model that would allow the County to easily support residential solar installations for its residents, should future funding become available

Through this call for grant applications, Cook County seeks a **Program Administrator** to administer the Cook County Sun and Save program, including program design, outreach, participant recruitment, eligibility verification, solar assessments, solar installations, and the required data collection elements therein. The primary objectives of the Program Administrator are to:

1. Recruit Cook County residents through targeted outreach, working in conjunction with local community groups to effectively communicate about the program through trusted messengers
2. Conduct free Solar Assessments to industry standards for each residence
3. Identify appropriate energy efficiency programs households should be participating in
4. Identify appropriate procurement of equipment and services and execute necessary contracts to install solar panels at each participating residence
5. Work with the County to capture all necessary data for reporting and evaluation.

The County will oversee the Program, monitor progress as outlined in all contractual agreements, and be responsible for submitting reports as required by the County and federal government.

Commitment to Equity and Priority Communities

Equity means full inclusion of all residents in the economic, social, and political life of Cook County, regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, age, ability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, neighborhood of residence or other characteristics.

- Cook County Office Under the President (OUP)

Cook County recognizes that some populations face greater barriers to engaging with, enrolling in, and benefitting from government services and programs than others. The County seeks a Program Administrator who has previous experience working with diverse and vulnerable populations who may face barriers to participation. The Program Administrator should also be committed to equity in program design. Priority populations and communities include, but are not limited to: low-income residents, communities of color, historically divested communities, and non-native English speakers.

A successful applicant will detail prior experience working to reduce barriers to access for these populations and will incorporate strategies for reducing anticipated barriers to participation in

Cook County. In its efforts to respond to the economic disparities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, Cook County aims to receive high rates of applicants from these priority communities. **While these populations are a focus of outreach efforts, they are not criteria for participant eligibility.**

d. Services Required

The overarching role of the Program Administrator is to manage the necessary processes and resources to enable successful delivery of the Cook County Sun and Save program. The goal of the program is to reduce energy burden and increase access to renewable energy for income-qualified homes and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The role of the selected Program Administrator will be to manage the implementation and sub-contractors while leveraging any existing utility, state or federal renewable energy incentives to ensure that the Cook County Sun and Save program funding has the biggest impact increasing renewables and reducing energy burden.

The Program Administrator will collaborate closely with DES to address program goals. Specific requirements across the lifecycle of the program are included below.

Program Development: As an expert in the renewable energy field, the Program Administrator will help refine the general program design so that the Residential Renewable Energy Subsidy program can be as successfully interwoven into any existing state, federal or utility renewable energy programs and incentives.

Outreach and Recruitment: The Program Administrator will perform outreach for the program, working with trusted community messengers to spread the word, conduct presentations, etc. in order to raise awareness of the program and recruit potential participants. The outreach will be focused within disinvested communities and communities of color within Chicago and suburban Cook County.

Solar Assessments: The Program Administrator will provide site assessments and system design cost estimates for each participant free of charge. Individual system designs should be aesthetically pleasing, taking into consideration the preferences of the owner while minimizing project costs and maximizing solar energy production.

Program Enrollment: Verify established income eligibility, program eligibility and obtain homeowner confirmation of participation in the program.

Collaboration with Existing Energy Efficiency Programs: A home that is energy-efficient will use less energy and there will be a greater reduction in utility bills for the program participants. The Program Administrator will ensure collaboration for homeowners with applicable existing energy efficiency programs, including but not limited to ComEd's Home Energy Assessment.

Solar System Installation: Once the site assessment and solar system design are complete, the Program Administrator will identify the appropriate procurement of equipment and services and execute necessary contracts to install the solar system.

Reporting and Evaluation: Throughout the entire process, the Program Administrator will collect data necessary for federal reporting guidelines and data Cook County specifies for Program metrics.

The Program Administrator may apply as a single organization, or as a lead organization in partnership with subcontracting/subrecipient organizations. Subcontracted agencies must demonstrate an ability to implement designated program elements. The lead organization must demonstrate financial capacity and ability to comply with all administrative requirements outlined in this scope of work. The applicant's response must include a description of which portion(s) of the services will be subcontracted out, the names and addresses of potential subcontractors, and the expected amount of money each will receive under the Contract. The County reserves the right to accept or reject any subcontractor if in the County's sole opinion, it is in the best interest of the County. Cook County plans to select one Program Administrator.

e. Project Timeline

Cook County anticipates that the Program Administrator will be contracted from December 2022 to August 2026. The Program Administrator should be prepared to begin work in December 2022, and to launch the participant application process in Spring 2023. Cook County plans to operate this program from Spring 2023 through Summer 2026.

II. Eligibility & Selection Criteria

a. Eligibility

The awarded organization must have the organizational capacity to conduct the work described in this application and have the fiscal and contracting capacity, as well as the accounting and administrative controls necessary to effectively manage a large federal grant. Requirements include financial stability, fiscal solvency, ability to provide separate reporting for use of funds, and staff to oversee the scope of work and comply with the agreement.

b. Evaluation Process

An evaluation committee comprised of County personnel and other stakeholders will evaluate all complete submissions in accordance with the selection criteria detailed below. Each eligible applicant will be evaluated on the strengths of the application, the responsiveness to the selection criteria, as well as in the context of the larger goals of the Cook County Sun and Save program. Successful applicants must be ready to proceed with the proposed program within a reasonable period of time upon selection, with initial program activities expected to begin by December 2022. Cook County reserves the right to reject any application if such application is incomplete, deemed inadequate or is otherwise not in the best interest of the County.

This evaluation process may result in a short-list of submissions. The evaluation committee, at its option, may request that all or short-listed proposers make a presentation, submit clarifications, provide references, respond to questions, or consider alternative approaches.

c. Selection Criteria

Criteria	Points
Relevant Experience and Program Design <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience implementing and managing large-scale, residential renewable energy programs • Experience with energy outreach to disinvested communities and communities of color • Experience working with renters and landlords • Ability to conduct eligibility verification, enroll, and onboard participants, and track program data • Clarity, accessibility, and thoughtfulness of program design 	60
Organizational Capacity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear staffing plan with qualified staff responsible for managing program components • Ability to manage subcontractors (if relevant) • Strength of existing infrastructure, systems, and processes for monitoring program expenditures • Ability to meet federal reporting requirements 	25
Performance Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear evidence of strong past performance • Experience with data-driven performance management 	15
Equity and Cultural Competency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrated commitment to equity and inclusion • Experience working with priority communities • Accessibility of program systems to diverse audiences 	15
Budget Justification <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrated financial capacity for all program components • Clear and reasonable costs 	5
Total Possible Points	120

III. Submission Information

a. Information Session

The Department of Environment and Sustainability will conduct a virtual information session on Friday, September 16, 2022 from 11:00am to 12:00pm CDT. Potential applicants are strongly encouraged to attend. Registration is required. Please register by clicking [here](#). Registrants will receive an email confirmation and a calendar invite after registration is complete.

b. Deadlines for Submission

All responses must be submitted no later than Friday, September 30, 2022, by 5:00pm CDT. All applications must be submitted electronically. Late submissions will not be considered. To submit your response, please complete the Grant Application in its entirety and email a completed version and all required attachments to environment@cookcountyil.gov

IV. Disclosures

a. General Guidelines

- i. Applicants shall comply with all laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, sex, color, national origin, disability, religion, age, sexual orientation; and/or any other legally protected classification group.
- ii. All submitted applications and related materials shall become and remain the exclusive property of DES.
- iii. DES is not liable for any costs incurred by the Applicant prior to the Partner and DES signing the Agreement.
- iv. An authorized representative of the organization shall submit the application and certification and such completion and submission of an application constitutes agreement with subsequent contracting requirements and with conditions of participation in the Cook County Sun and Save program as funded under the American Rescue Plan Act.
- v. DES reserves the right to reject any and all proposals that are deemed not responsive to its goals under the Cook County Sun and Save Residential Renewable Energy Subsidy Program.

b. Summary of Contract Terms and Conditions

The following summary outlines terms and conditions that will be used as the basis for developing subrecipient agreements with the selected grantee.

- i. **Funding:** The Cook County Sun and Save program is supported by funds from the U.S. Department of Treasury, under the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) program.
- ii. **Method of Payment:** Grantee must submit invoices to DES in such detail as DES requests and on a monthly basis. Advance payments will be considered where needed.
- iii. **Grant Budget:** DES and Grantee shall jointly develop a detailed grant budget that is based upon and consistent with the funding source(s). Any revisions of a line item in the working budget shall be subject to approval by DES.
- iv. **Grantee Qualifications:** Grantee shall ensure that all agents, employees, and subrecipients or subcontractors performing the services agreed upon, meet and maintain any licensure, certification and accreditation required to carry out such services.
- v. **Monitoring and Compliance:** Review and evaluation of the program will be performed, and regular contact with the grantee will be maintained to both maximize program coordination and adhere to federal and county guidelines.
- vi. **Reporting:** Grantees shall submit monthly, quarterly and/or final reports pursuant to U.S. Treasury ARPA reporting requirements and Cook County requirements as developed by DES.

- vii. Legal Requirements: Compliance with the Uniform Guidance and County legal requirements will be required.

Grant Application: Program Administrator

There are 7 sections to the application, including a list of required attachments. Please be sure to answer each question completely. Incomplete applications will not be considered. Applicants should answer directly in the provided application document. Email environment@cookcountyil.gov to submit the application including all the required application materials.

Section 1: Primary Contact Information

- Name
- Email
- Phone

Section 2: Organization Information

- Name
- Address
- Phone
- Website
- DUNS Number
- Years of Operation
- Head of Organization
 - Name
 - Title
 - Email
 - Phone
- Has your organization ever contracted with Cook County before?
- Has your organization ever contracted with another government entity before?

Section 3: Organization Overview

- a. Please provide an overview of your organization’s history, qualifications, experience, current resources, and accomplishments related to administering and providing solar services to income-qualified households.

Section 4: Solar Experience

- a. Describe your experience in providing solar services. At a minimum, this description should address the following: your history, qualifications, experience (specifically within ComEd’s territory), interconnection experience, current capacity, and performance related to providing renewable energy services. You shall provide a summary for each program, including the allocated funding, term and assessment of its performance and outcomes under the program (e.g., “successfully completed all program activities during the contract term”; “did not fully expend program dollars within contract term”, etc.). You should specifically describe your experience providing solar services to income-

qualified households and within Cook County. What barriers have you faced serving income-qualified households and how have you overcome them? What experience do you have navigating situations with renters and landlords in seeking program participation?

- b. Describe your experience with utility energy-efficiency programs, either administering programs or familiarity with utility energy-efficiency programs.
- c. Identify your key staff members (e.g., management, staff responsible for the successful provision of services), their project roles, and their requisite experience in providing solar PV services. Please provide staff resumes to substantiate the narrative as part of the required attachments in Section 8.
- d. Are you applying as a single agency or lead agency? Please include a description of which portion(s) of the services will be subcontracted out and the names and addresses of potential subcontractors.

Section 5: Management Capacity

- a. Describe your organization's experience managing teams and projects similar in scope and nature to that which is being proposed. This description should include your approach and organizational capacity to quickly design and implement a program infrastructure with multiple Subcontractor, if applicable.

Section 6: Outreach and Recruitment

- a. Please describe your plan for outreach and recruitment within Cook County. The plan should include details regarding any general marketing to all potentially eligible program participants and targeted marketing strategies to specific communities in the region, including door-to-door canvassing, telemarketing, newspapers, radio and television, fairs and community gatherings, social media, etc. The Outreach and Recruitment Plan should explain why the proposed approach will be effective and what it hopes to achieve.

Section 7: Budget and Reporting

- a. Please discuss how your organization will monitor program expenditures. Include a description of your organization's fiscal monitoring procedures and any experience your organization has with federal and/or local government fiscal compliance requirements.
- b. Please discuss any experience your organization has with federal and/or local government grant reporting requirements.
- c. Please attach a completed budget form and budget narrative as part of your application submission. Using the assumption that the average solar installation in Chicagoland is 6.5 kW, please provide the estimated cost of a solar installation as well as how many households you will be able to serve based on this estimation. Please breakout costs by

materials, labor, overhead, outreach, program administration, etc. Be sure to specify the level of funding dedicated to subcontractors, if applicable.

- d. Please describe how your team tracks and provides data and metrics – especially sensitive data with personal information – for monitoring, and reporting. How will this data be accessed by the County?

Section 8: Attachments (*Required)

1. **Completed Application*** - Submit your completed grant application. Incomplete applications will not be considered.
2. **Budget Form and Narrative*** - Submit a copy of your completed budget form and narrative.
3. **Key Personnel*** - Identify key personnel committed to this project and provide resumes of those key personnel.
4. **501(c)(3) IRS Determination Letter*** - Applicants should submit a copy of the IRS Determination Letter or Affirmation Letter exhibiting that the Corporation is tax exempt under 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4).
5. **List of Board of Directors*** - Please submit a list of your Board of Directors.
6. **Copy of Articles of Incorporation (recommended)** - Please submit a Copy of Amended Articles of Incorporation.
7. **Certificate of Good Standing (recommended)** - For applicants in the State of Illinois, please submit a Certificate of Good Standing. For applicants outside of Illinois, please submit a certificate of similar state documentation.
8. **Most Recent Financial Statement or Audit*** - Submit your A133 Single Audit, if applicable. Otherwise, submit your latest audited financials. If you do not have audited financials, you may submit other financial documents for consideration.
9. **Supporting Document 1** - Additional supporting documentation as needed.
10. **Supporting Document 2** - Additional supporting documentation as needed.
11. **Supporting Document 3** - Additional supporting documentation as needed.
12. **Supporting Document 4** - Additional supporting documentation as needed.