

ILLUME



# Illinois Solar for ALL

PY5 Results Webinar



April 8, 2025



PY5 Approach

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PY5 Results

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Program Overall

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Subprogram Findings

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IPA Responses to the PY5 evaluation

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Q&A and Wrap Up

# Ways to Provide Input

- Enter questions or comments into the chat
- We will have a 15-minute Q&A period at the end of our call
- In addition to the webinar, stakeholders can submit comments on the Evaluation Results to [ILSFAEvaluation@illumeadvising.com](mailto:ILSFAEvaluation@illumeadvising.com). Comment submissions should include “ILSFA PY5 Results Webinar – [Commenters Name]” in the email subject line.
- We also accept comments on an ongoing basis using [this form](#)



**QR Code to form link**







# PY5 Approach

# ILSFA Objectives



“...**bring photovoltaics to low-income communities** in this State in a manner that maximizes the development of new photovoltaic generating facilities, to create a **long-term, low-income solar marketplace** throughout this State, to integrate through interaction with stakeholders, with **existing energy efficiency initiatives**, and to **minimize administrative costs**”

# Why Evaluation?

- ▶ Broad goals to make solar more affordable, to create statewide solar marketplace, and deliver long-term bill savings, environmental, electric grid, and community benefits
- ▶ Requires coordination between a broad array of governmental organizations, market actors, non-profits, community organizations, and Illinois residents
- ▶ Evaluation assesses how effectively and efficiently the program is at accomplishing its goals. Improve processes to help program be more successful

## **Objective Criteria:**

*(developed through public stakeholder process)*

- Number of projects installed
- Total installed capacity in kilowatts
- Average cost per kilowatt of installed capacity
- Number of jobs or job opportunities created
- Economic, social, and environmental benefits created
- Total administrative costs

# Project Overview

## Process Evaluation

Evaluating the overall program operations and participants' experiences.

## Impacts\*: **Jobs & Economic**

Evaluating jobs created, economic impacts to employee compensation and GDP, tax impacts, and household spending impacts.

## Impacts\*: **Bill**

Evaluating participants' annual bill savings in dollars compared to the cost to acquire solar.

PY5  
Evaluation



## Impacts\*: **Electricity**

Assess quantity of projects, capacity, average system cost, capacity factor, energy produced, and peak load reduced for approved and energized projects.

## Impacts\*: **Environmental**

Evaluating reduced pollutants, including greenhouse gases, NOx, and SO2.

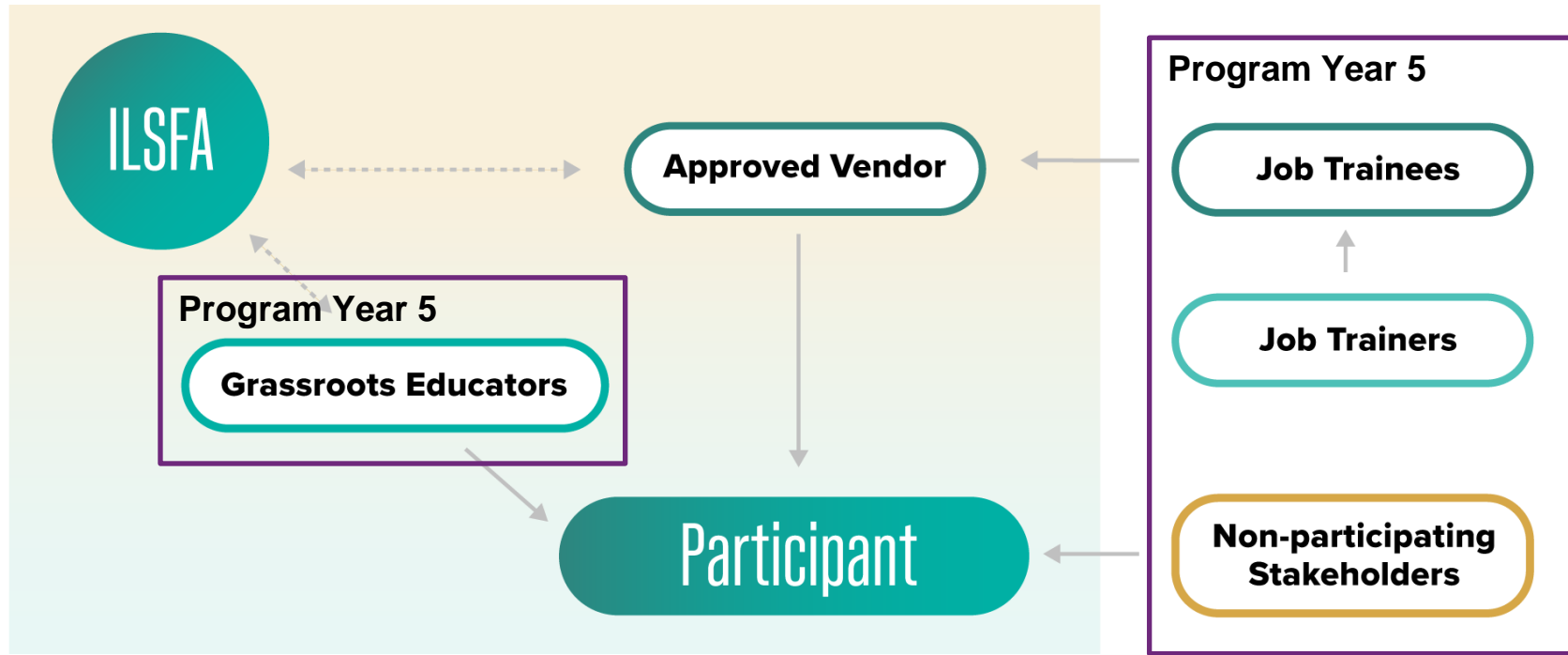
## Impacts\*: **Social**

Assess extent to which communities are directly benefitting from investments.

\*Please note that all impact results are based on modeled estimates, with the exception of capacity and cost information, which come from program tracking data



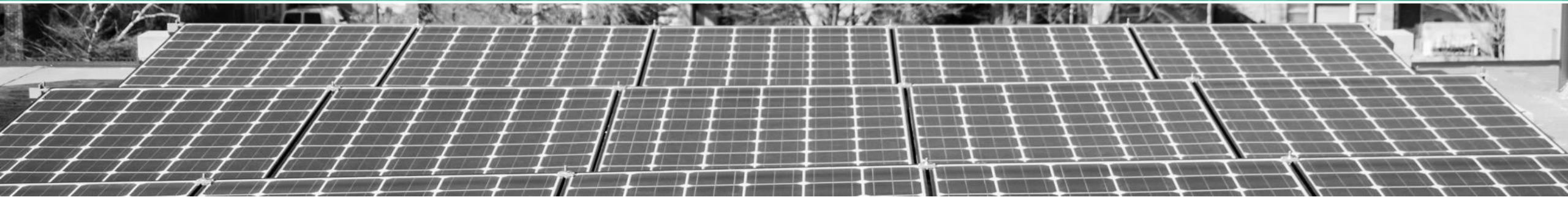
# Who We Collected Feedback From



- Collected feedback about PY5 and PY6
- Most feedback came from the Grassroots Educators who spoke to the experiences of potential Residential Solar (Small) and Community Solar participants, so that is where our findings are focused.



# Evaluation Results



# PY5 Overall Program Performance

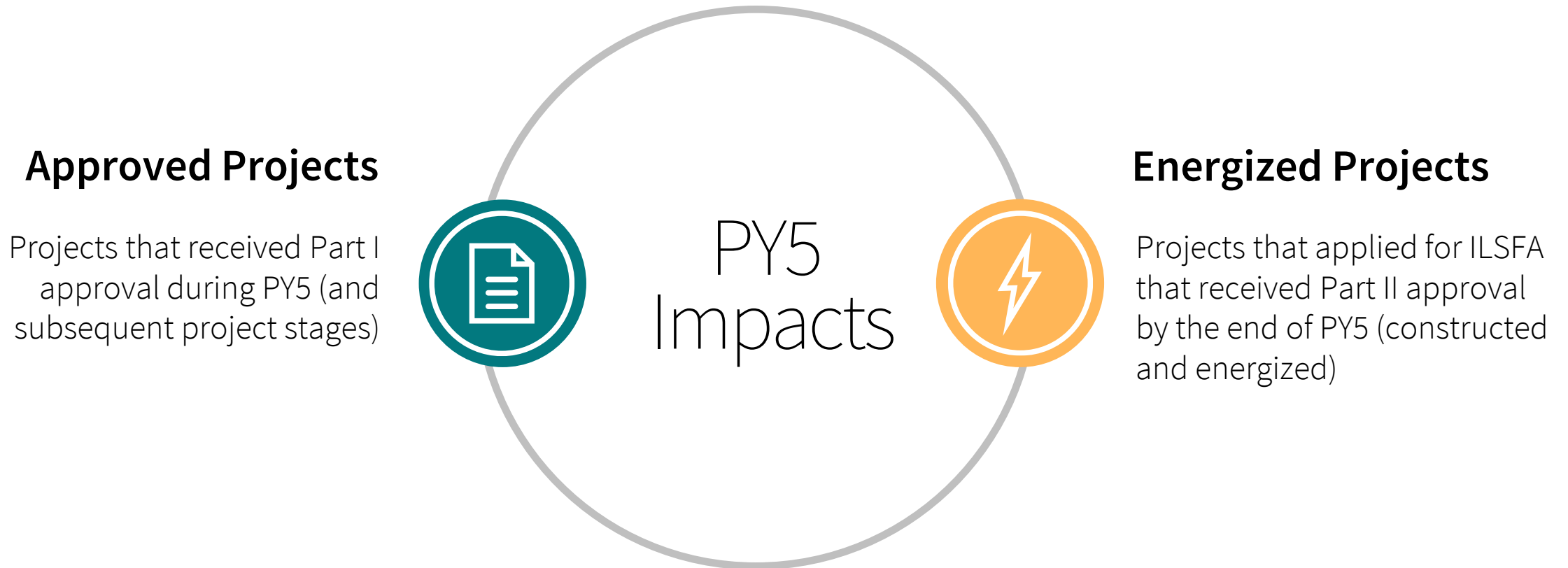


In PY5, the Non-Profit/Public Facilities program awarded almost all its incentives, Community Solar awarded 85%, and Residential Solar (Small) awarded 10% of its incentives. There were no Residential Solar (Large) projects approved in PY5.

Sub-program	PY5 Total Budget	PY5 Incentive Value of Approved Projects	% Budget Allocated to Incentives
Residential Solar (Small and Large)	<b>\$54,755,452</b>	<b>\$5,237,815</b>	<b>10%</b>
Non-Profit/Public Facilities	<b>\$16,822,130</b>	<b>\$16,712,016</b>	<b>99%</b>
Community Solar	<b>\$29,380,509</b>	<b>\$25,113,703</b>	<b>85%</b>

Source: Illinoissfa.com- Illinois Solar for All Sub-Program Budgets for 2022-2023 Announced- Accessed 10/18/2024 and PY5 program data tracking reports received from Elevate in 2024.

# Types of Impacts Assessed



Two approved projects were constructed and energized in the same program year, meaning they fall in both the PY5 Approved and PY5 Energized project categories (1 small residential, 1 non-profit/public facility)



# PY5 Statewide Impacts



## Approved Projects

- 17,453 kWac of solar added to the grid
- 33.1 GWh generated over the lifetime of these arrays

## First-Year Emissions Reductions Equivalent to

**4,315** Homes Powered  
for a Year

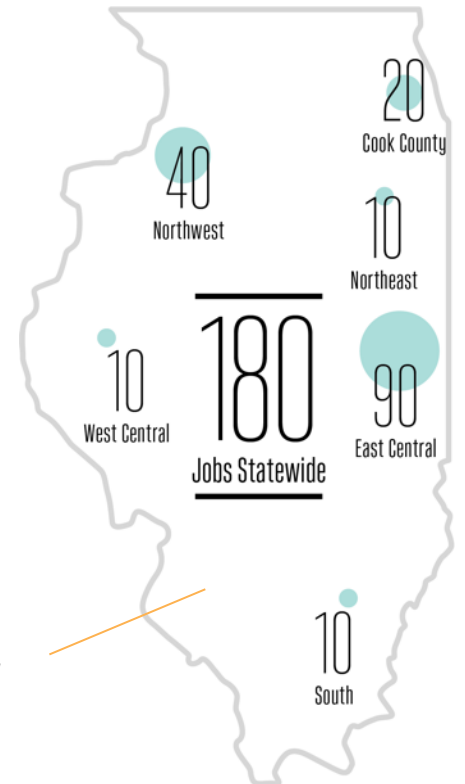


**3,496** Cars Taken Off  
the Road for a Year



## Energized Projects

- \$38.8 million in bill savings over the lifetime of the systems
- \$29.5 million dollars in estimated GDP impacts



**Demand for  
New Jobs**

# PY5 Overall Successes and Challenges



## **PY5 successes**

- Program funding increased
- Increase in number of projects approved
- CEJA changes implemented
- Program administrator streamlined submission processes for vendors



## **PY5 challenges**

- Implementation of CEJA delayed start of program
- Staffing challenges resulted in limited strategic oversight and challenges with program delivery



## **Recommendations:**

- Communicate schedule changes or delays to all program actors
- Ensure program administrator builds redundancy to ensure program can continue to operate smoothly in the case of staff turnover for leave of absence

# Energy Sovereignty

## How it works

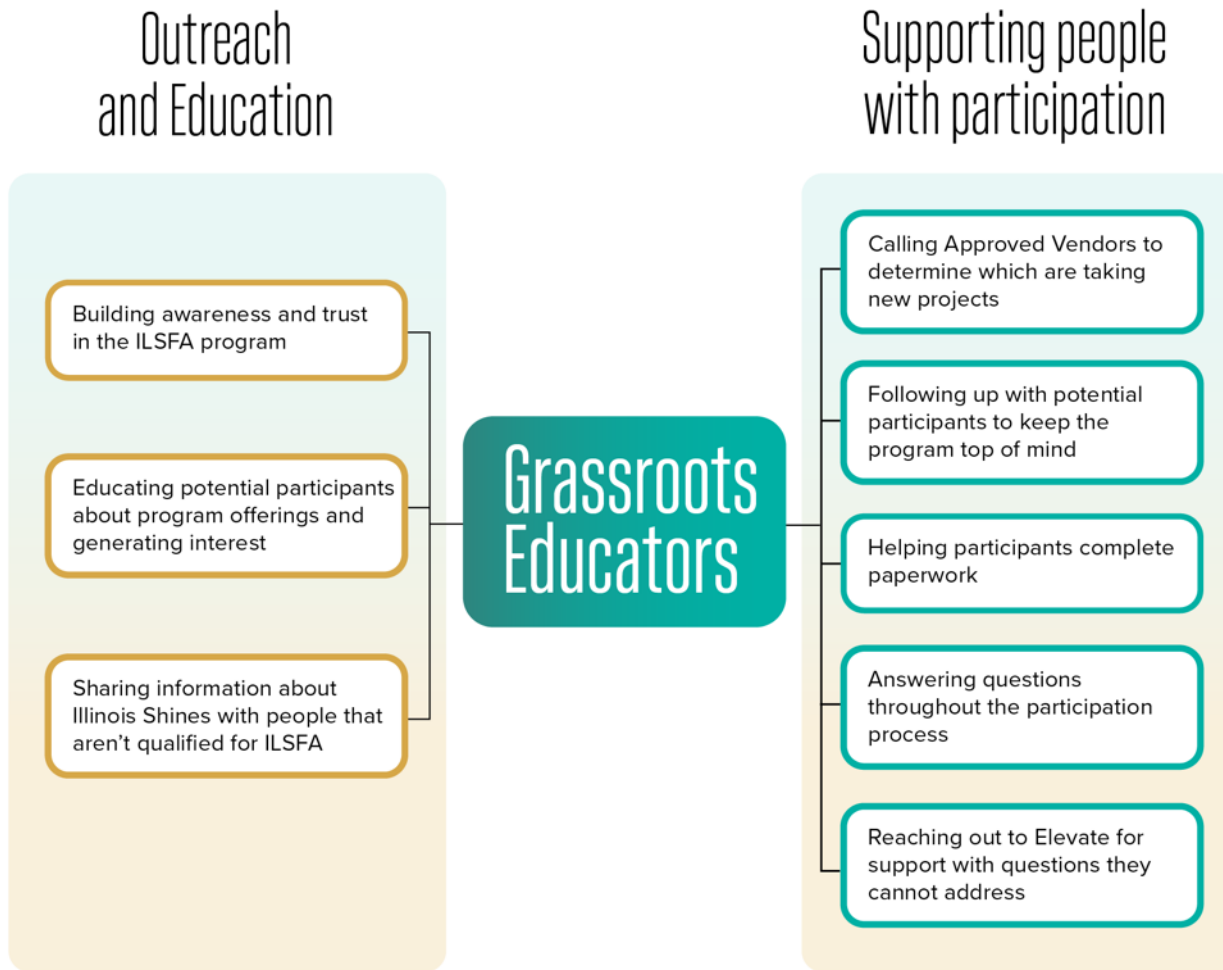
- Aims to build wealth in communities through ownership of projects by low-income households or community organizations serving low-income households
- 25% of program funding reserved for these projects for first 9-months of program year
- Often there is a clause to transfer ownership of the project from the vendor to the participant after several years

Subprogram	Percent of Approved Project Incentives Allocated to ES
Community Solar	28%
Residential Solar (Small)	2%
Non-Profit/Public Facilities	62%

## Challenges

- Operationalizing this element of the program was difficult due to need to update REC calculations, Salesforce, and solar contracts to accommodate Energy Sovereignty
- Despite this several Energy Sovereignty projects applied to the program
- Energy sovereignty was difficult to achieve for Residential Solar (Small) – participants realize similar benefits while having to assume risks of ownership, operations, and maintenance over the long term

# Grassroots Educators: Critical Program Partners



- Overall, Grassroots Educators appreciated ILSFA and wanted it to succeed
- Trusted partners who can help potential participants learn about the program and navigate the participation process

*“We want to have fun doing the work—how joyous we feel, it brings such joy, coming in, and saving money, electric bills are more affordable, doing their part to make climate and community healthier and cleaner. That’s the reason we do this.”*

*“[Our organization has] a well-earned and hard-earned reputation as voice for the people in the community. What they see in me is a person who speaks to them in a way that’s considerate, respectful, and helps them understand what’s available to them, give them the pros, the cons, and now they call me on the phone.”*



# Grassroots Educators Overall Feedback (PY5/PY6)



## **Challenges:**

- Want more support in promoting the program through materials and events
- Noted communication with Elevate as an area for improvement
- Frustrating for community members who try to participate, but can't find a vendor or community solar subscription
- Found program data tracking requirements to be burdensome



## **Recommendations for improvement:**

- Support Grassroots Educators in developing materials like testimonials and success stories, streamlining content of materials, and offering materials in more languages
- Elevate should attend Grassroots Educator events when possible; follow through if they say they will attend
- Improve and standardize communication with Elevate
- Continue to address program participation barriers
- Provide more technical support for Salesforce



# **Subprogram Findings**

# PY5 Impacts: Residential Solar (Small)

## Purpose

Install affordable, on-site panels for low-income residents on 1–4-unit dwellings with no upfront costs and guaranteed bill savings.

## Fast facts

- Number of projects: 233 approved, 110 energized



### Approved Projects

- Approved capacity installed: 1,551 kW<sub>AC</sub>
- 26% of approved project funding went to Environmental Justice Communities
- 86% of projects in ComEd service territory



### Energized Projects

- Average estimated bill savings: \$94.85 per month or 86% of the bill

# PY5 Impacts: Residential Solar (Small)

While there are higher barriers to entry for the Residential Solar (Small) program, this subprogram delivers larger household bill savings relative to Community Solar

86% of projects are located in ComEd's service territory, serving northern Illinois

9% of ILSFA approved project capacity came from Residential Solar (Small)

Program awarded 10% of its budget in PY5, indicating an opportunity to increase projects funded through the program





# Program Processes: Residential Solar (Small)

## **This subprogram is difficult to access due to the multiple steps required and lengthy timeline**

- Creates lots of opportunity for potential participants to drop-out of the program before finishing the participation process
- Income verification identified as a particular barrier due to long timelines

## **Grassroots Educators (GEs) try to support people by:**

- Helping participants connect with Home Repairs or other programs to help get their home solar ready
- Helping participants locate active Approved Vendors (AVs) in their region
- Following-up when they run into issues including lengthy wait times or AV difficulties

## **Recommendations for improvement**

- Amend GE contracts to formalize their role in supporting participants through the timeline
- Support GEs with a checklist or flow chat that outlines steps in the program processes, sets timing expectations, and clarifies GE roles
- Create networking opportunities for AVs and GEs to connect
- Home Repairs initiative and Community Solar can be solutions for people whose homes aren't solar ready

“ If they haven't found an Approved Vendor, and I haven't followed up with them, and they haven't heard anything, then what now? I'm trying to do more to help people, but I don't know what they need. ”

– Grassroots Educator

“ I think when people see an income eligible program, they expect it to be very streamlined. A lot of confusion comes in when it's so hard. ”

– Grassroots Educator

# PY5 Impacts: Community Solar

## Purpose

Allow homeowners and renters to benefit from solar energy savings without having to install solar on their property. Participants can subscribe to community solar for guaranteed energy savings.

## Fast facts

- Number of projects: 5 approved, 5 energized



### Approved Projects

- Approved capacity installed: 8,750 kWAC
- % of approved project funding in EJC's: 15%
- 20% of projects in ComEd service territory



### Energized Projects

- Average estimated bill savings: \$72.63 per month or 50% of the bill

# PY5 Impacts: Community Solar

The household level bill savings of the Community Solar are generally smaller than Residential Solar (Small). However, the program has a simpler sign up process and may be a good option for participants who struggle to make their homes solar-ready

50% of ILSFA approved project capacity came from Community Solar subprogram

80% of projects were located outside the ComEd service territory indicating that this program is more effective at reaching residents outside northern Illinois than Residential Solar (Small)

Program awarded 85% of its budget in PY5

15% of projects were located in EJC's indicating an opportunity to better serve EJC's through this subprogram



# Program Processes: Community Solar



## **Generally, participant experiences with community solar are positive**

- Grassroots Educators and word of mouth are both key sources of awareness and trust for the program - also true for Residential Solar (Small)
- However, participants face challenges finding available Community Solar subscriptions

## **Recommendations for improvement**

- Provide a database or live updates for Grassroot Educators on solar farm subscription availability and a timeline for when new subscriptions will become available



# PY5 Impacts: Non-Profit/Public-Facilities

## Purpose

Provides non-profit and public organizations with affordable on-site solar panels, with low or no upfront costs guaranteed bill savings.

## Fast facts

- Number of projects: 33 approved, 58 energized



### Approved Projects

- Approved capacity installed: 7,152 kWAC
- % of approved project funding in EJC's: 43%
- 36% of projects in ComEd service territory



### Energized Projects

- Average estimated bill savings: \$1,679 per month or 50% of the bill

# PY5 Impacts: Non-Profit/Public Facility

41% of total installed capacity came from Non-Profit/Public Facility subprogram

Program awarded 99% of its budget in PY5

Program was able to award entire carveout for both environmental justice communities and energy sovereignty

Like community solar, non-profit/public facility projects are more distributed throughout the state





# **Job Training Feedback**

# Job Trainers/Job Trainees

## Insights and Recommendations

- All trainings taught technical solar system installation and maintenance
- Training varied in structure, additional skills taught, and length



### **Job Trainers**

- Try to increase job opportunities by:
  - Aligning training schedules with seasonal employment demand
  - Cultivating relationships with solar installers
- Generally aware of ILSFA but don't know which trainees go on to work on ILSFA projects
- Requested more support in connecting trainees to potential employers and navigating program requirements



### **Job Trainees**

- Thought training program covered essential skills or were able to fill gaps through on-the-job training
- A little over half found positions through their job training program
- Most continued to work with approved vendors or in the same field
- According to job trainers, trainees can face barriers such as:
  - Transportation
  - Balancing job training and existing work responsibilities
  - Additional barriers for those leaving carceral system



An aerial photograph of a residential neighborhood. In the foreground, a large house with a grey shingled roof has a significant portion of its roof covered with dark solar panels. To the left, another house with a similar roof is visible. In the background, a white pickup truck is parked on a paved driveway, and a dark-colored car is parked further back. The scene is captured from a high angle, showing the layout of the houses and the surrounding landscape.

# IPA Responses



# IPA Responses to the PY5 Evaluation

The IPA implemented the following changes based on PY5 evaluation recommendations

## **Implemented:**

- Provided GEs clarity in developing participant materials and in outlining goals within their scope of work as part of regular check-ins
- Increased GE trainings, including technical support in Salesforce
- Utilized Home Repairs and Community Solar for participants without solar-ready residences
- Incorporated a Regional EJ Score in the Project Selection Protocol for CS and NP/PF projects to further prioritize projects in under-served areas
- Received financial supports through the federal EPA Solar for All Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund award which, to date, has increased the PY7 Community Solar budget

## **Under consideration:**

- Aiming to develop participant and GE resources which clearly outlines steps and timelines in subprogram processes
- Working towards providing GEs visibility into current and upcoming availability for community solar subscriptions
- Internally enhancing data governance and documentation
- Proposed expanding the list of third-party programs through which income is verified
- Proposed reducing redundant inspection requirements to streamline AV assurances

# Questions?

*We've Got Answers*

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