ILLINOIS POWER AGENCY

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Illinois Power Agency

Joint Program Administrator Request for Qualifications (26-RFQ-01)
Responses to Offeror Questions

Issued: September 15, 2025 (Updated September 22, 2025)

The purpose of the RFQ is to establish the list of Offerors found qualified to submit a response to a subsequent RFP. The questions provided below were submitted by prospective Offerors to this RFQ during the September 3 Q&A Workshop or through written submissions. Written submissions were due September 5, with this document providing responses to all questions received through this date. Some questions have been edited either to generalize them for all prospective Offerors and/or to maintain submitter confidentiality.

The Agency recognizes that prospective Offerors are likely to have technical questions about program designs that would inform their decision to participate in this RFQ/RFP process. Many of the technical questions asked are better aligned with the prospective RFP (yet to be issued) rather than the RFQ. The Agency has provided summary responses to the extent appropriate for the RFQ process; however, the Agency notes that many such questions are best considered as a component of the RFP itself and not this RFQ. The Agency will endeavor to include details addressing many of these technical questions in the future RFP, with prospective Offerors being directed to review that later process for expanded information and clarity.

1. *Regarding the RFQ Requirements for 2.7 Supplemental Information:*

   The first box labeled in the 2.7 Supplemental Information states: "Please provide additional information which may assist the Agency to assess the Offeror's background, experience, qualifications. Limit response to four pages. Do not send marketing materials, please."

   However, next to it states to "Click here to insert text;" are we to add text here or just have additional information up to 4 pages? Also, is the 20 page limit only for the responses to A-K or for the entire submission?

   Answer [REVISED]: The "boxes" found in Section 2.7 are not intended to necessarily incorporate the entirety of a response and may reference other materials. Each of the responses to

the first two subsections of Section 2.7 (Supplemental Information) should be limited to no more than 4 pages (as listed). The requirement to "limit the statement of qualification to no more than twenty (20) pages" found in Section 2.6, is specifically referencing the Offeror's "background, experience, and qualifications," excluding "resumes of key staff." This 20-page limit does not include supplemental information (Section 2.7) which contains its own limitations.

[**Added**] For the avoidance of doubt, the first box under Section 2.7 ("Please provide additional information…") may be up to 4-pages in length; the second box under Section 2.7 ("Please provide a brief high-level narrative…") may be up to 4-pages in length; and, for the third and final box under Section 2.7, there is no page limit.

2. *Would there be an offer in the table for those with experience in the community for partnership with the program administrators?*

   Answer: The RFQ process is one that seeks to vet prospective Offeror qualifications relative to the entirety of Joint Program Administrator RFQ/RFP. The Agency recognizes that there may be a broad array of firms and entities that are interested in potential participation in the Joint Program Administrator RFQ process, either as an Offeror or through partnership or subcontracting with an Offeror. The Agency encourages any such entities that do not have the desire and/or ability to meet the full qualification requirements within the RFQ to coordinate with other entities and/or prime Offerors. Further, the IPA will be issuing a Public Notification of qualifying Offerors, which can also provide entities with additional information to spur partnership and sub-contractor relationships.

3. *We'd like to better understand the sequencing and whether there are specific programmatic, contractual, or operational considerations driving the staggered transition. Can you share the Agency's rationale for having the Illinois Solar for All program transition to the new Program Administrator in 2026, while Illinois Shines transitions in 2027?*

   Answer: The transition timeline is predicated upon two core principles: (1) that the transition to a new Program Administrator for the Illinois Shines and Illinois Solar for All (ILSFA) Programs should not occur at the same time, and (2) balancing the transition timeline based upon the number of impacted Approved Vendors and likely quantity of projects that may be impacted. On the first principle, both Illinois Shines and ILSFA are complex programs. It is not ideal to attempt to transition both programs simultaneous due to that complexity and being that there are efficiencies that can be gained by transitioning one program first and building up that framework

for the second program. On the second principle, the Agency has proposed transitioning the ILSFA Program first as it has fewer total annual projects and a lower Approved Vendor count. While ILSFA is complex, the Agency has determined we will transition the smaller (fewer Approved Vendors and fewer anticipated project submissions) of the two programs first, and scale to the larger program (Illinois Shines) second.

Importantly, the transition timeline provided in the RFQ is an estimate and will be refined in the RFP and ultimately informed by Offeror capabilities and future collaborative discussions between the awarded Offeror and the Agency.

4. *Are there specific benchmarks or requirements the Agency has identified for a successful transition period?*

   Answer: No, there are no such benchmarks or requirements that have been identified at this time. The Agency expects to include additional information in the subsequent RFP.

5. *If a firm brings a specific tactical capability that could be beneficial to the response but could only cover 40% of what you are looking for, would you like to see response of what the entity provides or ask the entity to be a subcontractor?*

   Answer: To be a qualified Offeror, a prospective Offeror must meet all qualification criteria as defined in Section 2.2. If a party is not able to meet the full requirements of the RFQ but seeks to participate, the alternative solutions could be a partnership or a sub-contracting opportunity with a qualified Offeror. Also refer to the responses to Questions 2 and 11 for additional information.

6. *For the Illinois Solar for All Program, how many applications were submitted and reviewed per category (residential, community solar and non-profit/public entities)?*

   Answer: For the Illinois Solar for All 2024-25 Program Year the Residential Solar (Small) sub-program had 619 projects submitted, Residential Solar (Large) sub-program had two project submissions, the Non-Profit and Public Facilities sub-program had 41 project submissions, and the Community Solar sub-program had 7 project submissions. Project submissions for all

program years are available in the Project Dashboard on the Illinois Solar for All website.[1]

For Illinois Shines during the 2024-25 Program Year, 21,925 projects were submitted and received ICC approval. This included 21,170 Small DG projects, 599 Large DG projects, 57 community solar projects, 32 community driven community solar projects, 2 public school community solar projects, and 17 public school DG projects. Further, this total also includes 37 EEC community solar projects and 11 EEC DG projects.[2]

7. *How will the Agency ensure program continuity during the transition?*

Answer: The details surrounding this question will be addressed in the RFP. In general, the approach implemented to facilitate program continuity will be closely tied to the Offeror awarded the contract, their capabilities, and the alignment with current Program Administrator contracting and prevailing program activity timing. As explained in response to Question 3, the schedule determinants dictating which program transition occurs first and in how that transition will systematically occur, will be based upon conversations with the Offeror awarded the contract. To achieve this result, the Agency will work with the awarded Offeror to identify key systems that must be prioritized first to facilitate the transition of other down-stream processes, transfer of historic data and information (archiving), process and procedure development and implementation, communication protocols, and other related "start-up" activities the manage a seamless transition. The exact process to be undertaken is subject to information provided by prospective Offerors through the RFP process, the development of the contract and associated task orders, and resulting collaboration between the Agency and Awardee to develop and implement project management protocols.

8. *Are there preferred or required IT/security standards for portals, databases?*

Answer: The details surrounding information technology security standards will be provided in the RFP. Current Program Administrators use various systems and tools to implement and manage both Programs. This includes. for example. the use of in-house developed systems and portals, Salesforce-based supplier/vendor portals, and a secure, shared database for Program Administrator-to-Agency data and information exchange. Each has different structures and

[1] See: https://www.illinoissfa.com/vendors/project-dashboard/

[2] See: https://illinoisshines.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Data-Report-June-2025.pdf

protocols to maintain the integrity of information and confidentiality of data, data back-ups and reinforcements, etc.

Current Illinois Shines software platform and information infrastructure are SOC2 compliant for data security, software development and hosting, and data management. Further, as a component of the prospective RFP, the Agency will include an obligation that Vendors certify that information technology (information, software, systems, and equipment) comply with the applicable requirements of the Illinois Information Technology Accessibility Act (30 ILCS 587) Standards. Such Standards are published at https://doit.illinois.gov/initiatives/accessibility/iitaa.html.

9. *Does IPA own the portal used for Shines and ILSFA and will the new administrator be able to take the portal over?*

Answer: The portals used for each program were developed by the respective current Program Administrators (using Mendix for Illinois Shines and Salesforce for ILSFA). The Agency has ownership of that work product pursuant to a standard term in State of Illinois contract:

> USE AND OWNERSHIP: All work performed or supplies created by Vendor under this contract, whether written documents or data, goods or deliverables of any kind, shall be deemed work for-hire under copyright law and all intellectual property and other laws, and the State of Illinois is granted sole and exclusive ownership to all such work, unless otherwise agreed in writing. Vendor hereby assigns to the State all right, title, and interest in and to such work including any related intellectual property rights, and waives any and all claims that Vendor may have to such work including any so-called "moral rights" in connection with the work. Vendor acknowledges the State may use the work product for any purpose. Confidential data or information contained in such work shall be subject to confidentiality provisions of this contract.

10. *Can an organization submit a response as the prime organization on one RFQ submittal and as a subconsultant on other RFQ submittals?*

Answer: Through the course of the RFQ, Primary Offerors who meet the qualifications set forth in the RFQ will be invited to submit a proposal under the RFP. The Agency will issue a public announcement that will include the names of all Offerors invited to submit a proposal – thus all

prospective Offerors, sub-contractors, and other stakeholders will have insight into the pool of prospective Offerors to the subsequent RFP.

Further, the Agency strictly prohibits collaboration and/or collusion amongst prime Offerors or their sub-contractors who are seeking to submit proposals under this RFQ/RFP. The Agency strives to ensure transparency in instances where an organization may seek to be a sub-contractor for more than prime Offeror, or where a prime Offeror may also seek to be a sub-contractor to another prime Offer (as referenced in the original question, above). As such, as a component of the RFP, the Agency will require prime Offerors and their sub-contractors to certify that they: (1) have not colluded or otherwise coordinated on proposal submissions, (2) if an organization seeks to sub-contract with two or more prime Offerors who are invited to submit a proposal under the RFP, the sub-contracting organization has communicated with the prime Offerors that they may also be a sub-contractor to another organization, and/or (3) if an organization is a qualified Offeror and seeks to sub-contract with one or more other qualified Offerors who are invited to submit a proposal under the RFP, the sub-contracting organization has communicated with the prime Offeror(s) that they may also submit their own proposal as a prime Offeror. These certifications are intended to maintain the integrity of the RFP, reducing the risk of conflicts of interest, and ensure transparency for prime Offerors in instances that a prospective sub-contractor is or may also be a contractor for another prime Offeror.

11. *If a single organization does not meet all the required qualifications but they do meet all the qualifications with their partner organizations, would they be considered responsive for the RFQ?*

Answer: The qualification requirements for the RFQ can be met through a team approach; however, there must be only one prime Offeror. If that Offeror is found qualified through this RFQ and invited to submit a response to the subsequent RFP, the Offeror will either need to maintain the team proposed in the RFQ, or if changing partners, will need to request a requalification by the Agency during the RFP process.

12. *Has the program experienced a steady flow of incoming applications over the course of a year? Or are the 30,000 applications concentrated around a specific time of year?*

Answer: The Illinois Solar for All project submissions process has an initial submission window, and if available funding is not exhausted after the submission window, a sub-program will reopen for rolling submissions until the end of the Program Year on May 31 or when program funding is fully allocated. The initial submission windows have been staggered through the summer and fall and can represent a concentrated high volume submission period. Since early in 2025, the Agency has seen an unprecedented high volume of Residential Solar (Small) project submissions, receiving 336 projects in the two-week initial submission period for the 2025-26 Program Year, then receiving another 443 applications in three days of rolling submissions before the windows were closed. In the 2024-25 Program Year, the Non-Profit and Public Facilities (NPPF) sub-program saw a small concentration of projects during the submission window, transitioning to a low but steady volume through the spring, ending the Program Year with 41 projects submitted and utilizing most of the available budget. The NPPF sub-program currently appears to show a similar pattern for submissions the current 2025-26 Program Year. The Low-Income Community Solar sub-program usually sees a small number of large project submissions, often below ten in the initial submission window, and a few more through the rest of the program year if the funding hasn't been exhausted.

For Illinois Shines, Program Years run from June to May with an amount of capacity set forth in the Long-Term Plan. Under the 2024-25 Program Year, the Program Administrator reviewed over 28,000 Part I and Part II applications across all six categories,[3] the majority of the projects submitted and reviewed were comprised of Small Distributed Generation applications. Importantly the number of applications received and reviewed is influenced by the initial amount of capacity allocated to a Program, reallocation of unused capacity from previous Program Years, and the number of waitlisted applications in queue for processing.

13. *What system is currently used for the program's application/participant portal?*

Answer: For project application submissions, the Illinois Shines program currently utilizes a portal system built by the current Program Administrator, deployed and hosted on the coding application development platform Mendix, while the Illinois Solar for All Program uses a Salesforce-based portal system.

[3] See: https://illinoisshines.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/2025-End-of-Year-Report-v250722.pdf

14. *Who owns the website domains for Illinois Shines and ILSFA?*

    Answer: The Illinois Power Agency owns both Illinois Shines and ILSFA domain names and underlying website structures. The update and management of each website has been assigned to the current Program Administrators and would be transferred, as necessary, to the resulting Offeror Awardee of this RFQ/RFP process.

15. *On what platforms (e.g., WordPress, Drupal, custom CMS) are the sites currently built?*

    Answer: Both the Illinois Solar for All and Illinois Shines websites are built on WordPress.

16. *Will the existing email distribution lists/newsletter subscriber database be transferred to the new Program Administrator for use in its CRM/email marketing system?*

    Answer: Yes.

17. *Can you clarify what type of stakeholder engagement support is envisioned (e.g., workshops, public forums, listening sessions)?*

    Answer: The prospective RFP will include additional detail and information on the types of stakeholder engagement the Agency is envisioning. The IPA finds that feedback from our diverse body of stakeholders is critical, providing important insights and ultimately helping to inform how we develop and implement the Programs. Both Programs have a variety of means to collect feedback in a way that actively engages stakeholders through various forums and media. Examples have included:

    - Accepting written and verbal (workshop-based) comments on draft governing documents, such as the Illinois Shines Program Guidebook and ILSFA Approved Vendor Manual.
    - Conducting stakeholder feedback workshops on potential changes to program policy and processes.
    - Holding annual Illinois Shines Approved Vendor Roundtables for each of the Program's project sectors to provide an opportunity for participants to share Program feedback or suggestions and offer insights on market challenges and conditions.
    - Facilitating the annual Illinois Shines Approved Vendor and Designee Program Satisfaction Survey to assess Program participant satisfaction, identify areas for improvement within the Program, and solicit ideas for potential changes

- Facilitating the annual Illinois Shines Customer Satisfaction Survey to obtain customer insights about their experiences with Illinois Shines and with the solar companies with whom they contracted.
- Holding monthly Consumer Protection Working Group for discussion on market trends, best practices, consumer education, updates to Program requirements and documents, and other consumer protection issues for both Illinois Shines and Illinois Solar for All. Participants include consumers, solar companies, community and nonprofit organizations, and other members of the public. Facilitating the ILSFA Advisory Committee, which engages ILSFA stakeholders from a variety of backgrounds to provide input on Program improvements.
- Community and/or stakeholder engagement events such as through conferences or similar forums to educate on the programs and solicit feedback from participants.
- Ad hoc feedback has been requested from stakeholders for feedback on specific topics.

Importantly, these are historic examples – the Agency encourages prospective Offerors to consider these and/or other opportunities to enhance stakeholder engagement as a component of each Offeror's proposal following qualification under the RFQ.

18. *Can the Agency provide more details on which platforms or accounts the Agency expects a Program Administrator will monitor? Would management of ILSFA social media accounts be transferred to the new Program Administrator or would they be closed and require the new Program Administrator to create new social media accounts?*

Answer: Details surrounding specific accounts and platforms will be summarized in the RFP. In general, a Program Administrator will be required to monitor Program-specific emails and inboxes aligned with various targeted topics (e.g., general administrator inbox, consumer complaints), web forms, hotlines, and vendor portals. Social media accounts and platforms will also be managed by the Program Administrator. Additionally, consumer protection requirements for Approved Vendors and Designees that participate in the Programs include requirements that apply to online marketing, email, and social media. The Program Administrators currently monitor social media posts (including but not limited to Meta, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, and X) to ensure compliance from Program participants.

19. *Which social media platforms and accounts should be monitored? Will management of existing Illinois Shines/ILSFA social media accounts be transitioned to the new PA, or will the new PA be expected to establish new accounts?*

    Answer: See the response to Question 18.

20. *What process or system is currently in place for Approved Vendors to submit marketing materials for review and approval?*

    Answer: Section 7.6 of the ILSFA Approved Vendor Manual[4] details the current process for Approved Vendors and Designees to submit their ILSFA marketing materials for review. Section 2.D. and Appendix G of the Illinois Shines Program Guidebook[5] detail the marketing material submission process for the Approved Vendor application review and approval.

21. *What application portal is currently in use, and how is transition of this platform to a new Program Administrator envisioned?*

    Answer: See the response to Question 13.

22. *Is this system intended to be a separate portal from the online portal for project submission?*

    Answer: It is the Agency's understanding that this question refers to RFQ Section 2.2 "Technology and Data Infrastructure". Specifically, to "Create and maintain a system that logs, tracks, and reports grassroots education budgets, activities, and events, with simple and user-friendly interface."

    The system developed and implemented by the Program Administrator may be a single, unified application that is linked to Program portals or other systems, or may be a separate system from that of the portals. Any system(s) developed should be designed such that there are clear cross-platform processes and protocols to ensure the seamless exchange of data and information,

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[4] See: https://www.illinoissfa.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/2025-2026_Approved-Vendor-Manual-Version-8.0.pdf

[5] See: https://illinoisshines.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Illinois-Shines-2025-26-Program-Guidebook-Final-18-April-2025-3June2025-correction-for-publication.pdf

attention to detail, quality assurance and quality control checks, ease of access to the data and information to support reporting or other required data pulls, and that the overall integrity of the systems and the information they house are of the highest quality.

23. *Will funding be available for the Program Administrator to partner with community-based organizations to enhance outreach and engagement?*

    Answer: Any proposed outreach, engagement, and other activities should be a component of the forthcoming RFP process, defined as a component of the Offeror proposal. Program-defined engagements and outreach should be a component of Offeror proposals under the RFP, subject to Agency and Program needs, and based upon an overall consideration of Program costs and benefits (inclusive of overall funding sources themselves, which can be used to support the programs).

24. *Are there currently Environmental Justice or equity working groups established that the new Program Administrator would be expected to engage with?*

    Answer: For ILSFA, the Program Administrator would facilitate the Environmental Justice Self-Designation Committee, which primarily reviews and scores applications for Environmental Justice Community self-designation applications, but also provides feedback on potential updates to environmental justice community-related Program policy. As mentioned in Question 17, the Program Administrator would also facilitate the ILSFA Advisory Committee, which seeks to engage a diverse range of ILSFA stakeholders.