# Guidance for the Community Solar Energy Sovereignty (CSES) Grant Program

### Definition of “Community Solar” for CSES:

The [U.S. Department of Energy defines community solar](https://www.energy.gov/eere/solar/community-solar-basics) as any solar project or purchasing program, within a geographic area, in which the benefits of a solar project flow to multiple customers such as individuals, businesses, nonprofits, and other groups. Community solar is a form of solar energy generation that allows community members of all types to access meaningful benefits of renewable energy, including reduced energy costs, low- to moderate-income household access, increased resilience, community ownership, and equitable workforce development and entrepreneurship.

DCEO encourages applications with any of the following types of community solar projects:

* Projects that are intended to apply for Community Solar incentives from [Illinois Solar for All](https://www.illinoissfa.com/programs/community-solar/), [Traditional Community Solar](https://illinoisshines.com/traditional-community-solar/) incentives from Illinois Shines, or [Community-Driven Community Solar](https://illinoisshines.com/community-driven-community-solar/) incentives from Illinois Shines.
* Other community solar generation and renewable energy procurements as described in the Illinois Power Agency Act. Applicants choosing this approach should cite the applicable section(s) of the Act and justify how their project meets the community solar definition above.
* Alternative community solar project models that create community ownership and other local community benefits, including local community wealth building via community renewable generation projects.

For more information about community solar and examples of possible models, applicants can refer to the following resources:

* Illinois Solar for All: [Community Solar](https://www.illinoissfa.com/programs/community-solar/)
* Illinois Shines: [Explore Community Solar](https://illinoisshines.com/exploring-community-solar/)
* [Illinois Power Agency Act](https://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/ilcs5.asp?ActID=2934&ChapterID=5) (20 ILCS 3855)
* Co-op Power [Community Energy Coops](https://www.cooppower.coop/what-is-a-community-energy-co-op)
* Cleveland, OH [potential model for equitable, community-owned solar](https://energynews.us/2021/09/23/in-cleveland-a-potential-model-for-equitable-community-owned-solar/)
* [People Power Solar Cooperative](https://www.peoplepowersolar.org/)
* [University Park Community Solar LLC](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/university-park-community-solar-llc-the-first-community-solar-power-initiative)
* U.S. Department of Energy: [Clean Energy Connector](https://www.energy.gov/communitysolar/clean-energy-connector)
* U.S. Department of Energy: [Community Solar Program Design and Subscription Models](https://www.energy.gov/sites/default/files/2023-03/Community%20Solar%20Program%20Designs%20and%20Subscription%20Models.pdf)
* [The 2022 Sunny Awards for Equitable Community Solar](https://www.energy.gov/communitysolar/2022-sunny-awards-equitable-community-solar), U.S. Department of Energy.

We recommend that applicants clearly describe the proposed model(s) they are considering for solar system ownership, subscriber/shareholder participation, sale of electricity, sale of renewable energy credits if applicable, and other incentive programs if applicable.

### How can applicants adequately describe and demonstrate community ownership, local community benefits, wealth building, and other benefits for participating households?

For specific ideas of how to identify and define the benefits of applicants’ proposed models, please refer to the [Primary and Secondary Selection Criteria](https://illinoisshines.com/community-driven-community-solar/) under the Illinois Shines description of the Community-Driven Community Solar program.

Potentially relevant criteria from this resource include the following:

* **Community ownership or community wealth-building** through having a target percentage goal for the ownership of the project held by community residents or non-profit organizations which directly serve the community where the project is located. This would include having members of the community being able to participate in decisions regarding the governance, operation, maintenance, and upgrades of and to the project; and members of that community benefiting from the project through subscriptions to the project.
* **Additional direct and indirect benefits**, beyond project participation as a subscriber, such as economic, environmental, social, cultural, and physical benefits.
	+ Some examples of direct benefits: financial benefits for the owner(s) and subscribers, such as bill savings, revenues from project ownership, tax credits, and the financial value of the project, as well as job creation, direct income, and increased economic activity in the defined geographic community.
	+ Some examples of indirect benefits: demonstration of environmental, workforce, and cultural benefits.
* **Meaningful involvement in project organization and development** by community members, non-profit organizations, or public entities located in or serving the community, such as public input processes that allow participation and engagement in the program design process, including workshops, webinars, and public comment periods all of which afford stakeholders (those who have an interest or stake in an issue, such as individuals, interest groups, and communities) the opportunity to influence decisions that impact their community.
* **Engagement in project operations and management** by nonprofit organizations, public entities, or community members, such as continuous community participation and consultation as projects are built, operated, and maintained in a way that affords opportunities for the community to weigh in on and make decisions regarding the project.
* **Project origination:** Whether the project is developed in response to a site-specific RFP developed by community members, or a non-profit organization or public entity located in or serving the community.
* **Projects developed in collaboration** with CEJA programs such as the Clean Jobs Workforce Network Program, the Illinois Climate Works Pre-apprenticeship Program, the Returning Residents Clean Jobs Training Program, the Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Program, or the Clean Energy Primes Contractor Accelerator Program. This could include community benefits such as utilizing graduates of job training programs in project development; hiring job training graduates permanently for future projects, not just the applicant project; an expansion of the goals of the job training programs to include ‘business training,’ on how to develop a project, get financing, recruit customers, etc.
* **Projects that are developed and located** within equity investment eligible communities.
* **Projects that are developed and installed** by equity eligible contractors.