



Request for Proposals

Original Issue Date: April 19, 2021

Closing Date: May 28, 2021

Subject: **Request for Proposals – SolSmart Organizational Advisor**

The Solar Foundation (TSF) is seeking proposals from eligible Respondents for professional services. TSF anticipates making 3-5 Awards as a result of this solicitation. TSF reserves the right to award more or fewer awards than anticipated above.

Under TSF's Department of Energy-funded Cooperative Agreement No. DE-EE0007155, SPARC Technical Assistance Provider (TAP), TSF is requesting proposals for organizations to take primary responsibility for providing technical assistance to and designating local governments under the SolSmart program.

Please see below to learn more about general RFP conditions, eligibility criteria, the Advisor opportunity, and more.

TSF appreciates your responsiveness and looks forward to the prospect of working with your organization to achieve our programmatic objectives.

Sincerely,

Theresa Perry
Program Director – SolSmart Technical Assistance Provider

PURPOSE

TSF seeks qualified organizations to take primary responsibility for designating a number of communities under [SolSmart](#), a program that helps local governments encourage the growth of solar energy. The primary objective of this solicitation is to recruit qualified organizations to serve as SolSmart Advisors to increase the total number of under-resourced communities designated under the program. A secondary objective is to increase the total number of designated local jurisdictions, especially in states where there are few or no current designated cities and counties.

Anticipated services include, but may not be limited to: (1) engaging with new or existing local government contacts; (2) committing these communities to achieving designation under the SolSmart program; (3) assuring each community completes an accurate and thorough SolSmart designation application; (4) conducting a gap analysis based on SolSmart criteria already achieved in each community and additional criteria required for designation; (5) providing technical assistance to each community around these additional criteria; (6) collecting and submitting documentation verifying completion of all additional criteria, thereby qualifying each community for designation under the SolSmart program; and (7) providing additional technical assistance, where feasible, to address each community’s solar goals.

Respondents will also be expected to assist in the creation of program promotional materials and content, assist in programmatic outreach to additional communities beyond those directly served under this solicitation, and contribute to communication efforts to share program successes.

ABOUT THE SOLAR FOUNDATION

[The Solar Foundation](#) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to advancing solar energy use worldwide. Our mission is to accelerate adoption of the world’s most abundant energy source. Through our leadership, research, and capacity building, we create transformative solutions to achieve a prosperous future in which solar technology is integrated into all aspects of our lives.

In July 2021, TSF will merge with the [Interstate Renewable Energy Council](#) (IREC). Founded in 1982, IREC is a 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation incorporated under the laws of Florida whose mission is to build the foundation for rapid adoption of clean energy and energy efficiency to benefit people, the economy, and our planet. Advisor contracts will be with IREC following the merger.

BACKGROUND

Under a Department of Energy-funded cooperative agreement (No. DE-EE0007155), TSF leads outreach and technical assistance for the SolSmart program. SolSmart provides recognition and no-cost technical assistance to help local governments reduce barriers to solar energy growth. With the help of our team of solar and local government experts, cities, counties, towns, and regional organizations nationwide are cutting red tape to make it easier for homes and businesses to go solar. Local governments that achieve these goals are eligible for SolSmart designation, providing national recognition that they are “open for solar business.”

TSF co-leads the program with the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). ICMA is the designation program administrator, responsible for reviewing and awarding designations. Both TSF and ICMA take part in outreach to promote and generate interest in the program. Since its formal launch in April 2016, more than 400 cities, counties, and regional organizations have been designated Bronze, Silver, or Gold under the SolSmart program.

TSF oversees the work of other partner organizations that support SolSmart including the Electric Power Research Institute; the National League of Cities; the National Association of Counties; Cadmus; Brooks Engineering; Great Plains Institute; and the Solar Energy Industries Association. They provide outreach and no-cost technical assistance to municipalities and counties pursuing designation under the SolSmart program. ICMA partners include the National Civic League, Home Innovation Research Labs, Cadmus, and TSF, which together manage the designation aspect of the SolSmart program.

By encouraging solar energy development at the local level, SolSmart helps local governments bring new businesses to their communities, promote economic growth, and foster the creation of new jobs. Specifically, the SolSmart technical assistance team works with local government staff to identify programs and practices that can encourage solar energy development. The objective is to help communities meet SolSmart criteria that are required to achieve designation. These criteria are related to Permitting and Inspection, Planning and Zoning, Government Operations, Community Engagement, and Market Development. A complete list of the criteria and further information on the program can be found in the SolSmart Program Guide, available at <https://solsmart.org/wp-content/uploads/SolSmart-Program-Guide-2021.pdf>.

Advisor Program

One strategy for achieving ambitious program goals is the SolSmart Advisor program. This program recruits organizations with a strong track record in clean energy and local government outreach to work with a select group of local communities to become designated under the SolSmart program. SolSmart has conducted three recruitment rounds under the program, resulting in 20 advisor organizations serving over 200 local governments.

This RFP is the SolSmart program’s fourth opportunity for organizations to host advisors. The Advisors will be temporary, program-funded, and program-trained staff who work in selected communities pursuing SolSmart designation for up to seven months. The focus of this round will address specific findings in a recent independent evaluation of the program, which found: “Larger, wealthier communities tend to pursue SolSmart designation and earn more points within SolSmart.” This suggested that under-resourced communities, defined by the evaluators in terms of *leadership, technical, administrative, and financial* characteristics of the local government and community, were less frequently served by the program. We ask that organizations applying for this round focus on under-resourced communities, and secondarily focus on states with few or no SolSmart designations.

Under-Resourced Communities

Our definition of under-resourced communities is very broad, leading to multiple ways to serve this constituency.

One approach to identifying under-resourced areas would be to consider states or regions of the country that are less wealthy. SolSmart would be especially interested in proposals that target regions with lower GDP per capita and lower median household income. U.S. territories and tribal nations would also likely fall into this preferred category.

Another approach is to focus on the less wealthy local jurisdictions in a state or region. Under this approach, the state or region may not necessarily be less wealthy, but the targeted jurisdictions would be. The selected Advisor organization would be expected to describe how they will identify and work with those local governments. For example, an organization might focus on rural counties, many of which lack the resources to promote and regulate solar development. Alternatively, an organization could focus on less wealthy municipalities within a metropolitan area.

A third approach is to focus on communities wishing to serve low-to-moderate income and minority households through the SolSmart program. For this approach, the cities, counties, and regional organizations targeted for designation may not necessarily have relatively lower wealth overall, but the Advisor organization would work with prospective jurisdictions to achieve criteria that support the disadvantaged populations within their jurisdiction. Such criteria could include solar employment & training, community solar, and solarize campaigns.

States Not Served by SolSmart

As a secondary objective, SolSmart seeks designations in states with few or no SolSmart designations. There are nine states without any SolSmart designations: Alabama, Delaware,

Louisiana, Maine, Mississippi, North Dakota, South Dakota, West Virginia, and Wyoming. There are four states with only one designation: Arkansas, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Idaho. Many of these states have limited resources compared to others, so new designees in these states would likely generate more designations from under-resourced communities.

These states also tend to have lower levels of solar development, so are missing out on the economic and environmental benefits of solar energy experienced in other parts of the country. For example, eight of the 13 states listed above rank 40 or higher in solar jobs per capita.¹

ELIGIBILITY:

This solicitation is open to a variety of organizations working with local government entities including, but not limited to regional planning commissions, councils of government, and nonprofits focused on energy, environmental, local government, or other issues, possessing the “Key Qualifications” for performing the services sought under this solicitation.

KEY QUALIFICATIONS:

1. **Strong Existing Community Connections that Include Under-resourced Regions.** Demonstrated by a proven track record of having collaborated with communities on solar energy and/or other relevant efforts. Additionally, we expect that prior to submitting this RFP, communities will obtain and submit letters of commitment (e.g., [SolSmart PR-1 Solar Statements](#)) from local governments to be served and designated by the Respondent.
2. **Relevant Subject-Matter Expertise.** Respondents must demonstrate their experience working with under-resourced local governments and/or solar-related issues. The most competitive applications will describe how their expertise relates to the SolSmart criteria.
3. **Existing Staff Capacity.** Respondents with adequate existing staff resources will receive preference. CVs or resumes for each staff member who will provide services under this solicitation will be required as part of the proposal. If staff capacity does not exist, there is an opportunity to hire an Advisor to complete a proposed scope of work. In this instance, justification of how current staff could support a new staff member is required.

SCOPE OF WORK

At a minimum, successful Respondents must be qualified and commit to:

¹ The Solar Foundation, *National Solar Jobs Census 2019*, Appendix A. The states are Alabama, Arkansas, Idaho, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Dakota, West Virginia, and Wyoming. The ranking includes 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

1. Community Engagement. Awardees will engage with new or existing local government contacts and work with them to achieve SolSmart designation. Local governments eligible for designation include cities, counties, and regional planning organizations.
2. Community Application and Gap Analysis. With assistance from the SolSmart team, Awardees will assure each community completes an accurate and thorough SolSmart designation application and will conduct a gap analysis based on SolSmart criteria already achieved by each community and the additional criteria desired by the community to attain a Bronze, Silver, or Gold designation. This gap analysis will form the basis of a designation work plan, each of which will require approval by TSF and/or its partners before the Awardee can provide technical assistance.
3. Stakeholder Engagement and Technical Assistance. Awardees will coordinate effectively with the communities served and with relevant internal and external stakeholders and provide each community with technical assistance designed to complete the criteria and any other requirements for designation. TSF and its partners will be available to support and/or partner with Awardees on the application process, gap analysis, and technical assistance delivery.
4. Documentation and Designation. Awardees will collect and submit documentation verifying completion of all criteria and ensure that each community served achieves designation before the end of the contract term.
5. Communications and Outreach. Awardees will also be expected to assist in the creation of program promotional materials/content and assist in programmatic outreach to additional communities beyond those directly served under this solicitation. Also, Awardees will work with SolSmart communications staff to share programmatic successes.
6. Project Management. Awardees will participate in regular check-in calls, project reporting, and other project management activities.

Anticipated Contract Term: Services under any contracts made through this solicitation are expected to commence on or about July 10, 2021 (with the potential to begin as early as July 1, 2021) and conclude no later than February 15, 2022. A mandatory virtual training will occur but will be dependent on when services commence.

TSF and the SolSmart team will evaluate and approve designation work plans for each community. TSF and its partners will also provide support and information to each Awardee around the application and designation processes and will assume responsibility for formally reviewing SolSmart designation applications and evaluating criteria verification documentation.

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS:

<p>Cover Page:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name of applying organization; • Name and title of the organization’s representative who has signatory authority to submit the application; • Name, title, and contact information of the organization’s point of contact with whom TSF and/or its partners should coordinate on matters related to the application. Contact information should include mailing address, email, and telephone number.
<p>Approach:</p>	<p>Describe the overall approach to the project. Respondents should note which objective(s) they intend to pursue to meet the goals of the RFP. For efforts targeting under-resourced communities in relatively wealthy states, the applicants should explain how they identified the under-resourced cities, counties, and regional organizations.</p>
<p>Local Commitment:</p>	<p>Please provide the number and name(s) of local governments your organization proposes to qualify for designation under this solicitation.</p> <p>Include SolSmart PR-1 Solar Statements or equivalent (e.g. a signed letter from an elected official or city/county administrator demonstrating commitment to the Advisor process) for each community listed in this section. Statements should be signed by a local elected official or another individual with authority to commit the local government to achieving designation. Without a signed solar statement, the submitted community will not be included in the evaluation of a proposal.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This information will be used to establish the Key Qualifications of “Strong Existing Community Connections.” <p>The most competitive applications will include the greatest number of communities but will be balanced with the demonstrated capacity to serve those communities.² As such, each Respondent should provide a summary of their previous work or existing relationships</p>

² E.g., qualitative descriptions of prior work supporting the conclusion that these prospective SolSmart communities will be prepared to become SolSmart designees within a short time frame.

	with the local governments listed in this section and other factors that they believe will contribute to achieving the anticipated SolSmart designations.
Scope:	Please provide at least one project milestone for each month covered by the scope of work. These milestones can relate to point totals, criteria/prerequisite achievement, number of communities designated, or other SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timely) metrics that represent a clear path to designation for all communities covered by the scope to achieve designation within the contract term. Please include references to SolSmart criteria, where applicable.
Organization Profile:	<p>Please limit to no more than two pages. CVs or resumes for staff who will provide services under this solicitation will not count toward the page limit.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a short description of your organization. • Provide the year established in the current business for the services requested in this request for proposals. • CVs or resumes of staff members who will provide services under this solicitation or serve as managers. Include a table indicating how much time each person will devote to this contract. If the organization plans on hiring a new staff member for the Advisor role, please provide justification. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ This information will be used to establish the Key Qualification of “Existing Staff Capacity.”
References:	<p>The contact information should include the contact name, phone number, e-mail address, and website address. References will be contacted as part of the evaluation process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • References will be considered in establishing the Key Qualification(s) of “Relevant Subject-Matter Expertise” and/or “Strong Existing Community Connections.”
Budget:	TSF will consider proposals that are either fixed-fee or effort rate-based subject to a maximum not to exceed amount. Other arrangements fair and favorable to TSF will also be considered. All budgets should clearly identify staff assigned to the project and their expected hours and expenses.

	<p>Please describe your pricing method and why this would be advantageous to TSF.</p> <p>Please be advised that TSF is cost-conscious about procuring outside services.</p> <p>TSF anticipates each contract amount to range between \$30,000 - \$50,000. Final contract amounts will primarily be influenced by the level of effort and time required to complete the scope of work (i.e., to designate the number of local governments specified in the proposal).</p>
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CONTRACT TERM

TSF expects all services sought under this solicitation will be completed no later than February 15, 2022. Final dates and timelines will be negotiated upon award.

EVALUATION AND AWARD PROCESS

Proposals will be evaluated and weighted based on the ability to execute as evidenced by staff capacity (20%) and past performance (35%), strength and strategic nature of the Scope of Work (35%), and budget (10%). Applicants must be able to demonstrate they have performed work/delivered services substantially similar to those in this solicitation.

TSF reserves the right to make Awards under this solicitation on the sole basis of the information provided in the Respondent’s proposal and without further negotiation. Respondents are thus encouraged to offer their best terms and prices in the initial proposal.

INSTRUCTIONS TO RESPONDENTS

Respondents interested in providing the services described above should submit a proposal following the prescribed format in the Submission Requirements section of this RFP. Adherence to the proposal format by all Respondents will ensure a fair evaluation with regard to the needs of TSF and the SolSmart program. Respondents who do not follow the prescribed format may be deemed non-responsive.

A letter transmitting the proposal must be signed by an officer of the organization authorized to bind the Respondent as required by this solicitation. A complete proposal will include:

1. Transmittal Letter

2. Proposal of no more than ten (10) pages, excluding CVs or resumes and [SolSmart PR-1 Solar Statements](#)/Letters of Commitment
3. Written proof of liability insurance and worker’s compensation coverage
4. Completed and signed IRS W-9 form

Proposal packages must be submitted electronically in PDF format to tperry@solarfound.org. Subject lines should read “**Request for Proposals – SolSmart Advisor**”. No phone calls please.

Applications received after the closing date stated on the top of page 1 may be deemed non-responsive.

GENERAL CONDITIONS

Communication: Technical questions concerning this solicitation should be directed to the TSF SolSmart TAP Program Director Theresa Perry tperry@solarfound.org . All communications must include the solicitation title, **Request for Proposals – SolSmart Organizational Advisor**, in the subject line. Answers to general questions will be posted on the SolSmart website.

No communication intended to influence this procurement is permitted except by contacting the designated contacts above. Contacting anyone other than the designated contacts (either directly by the Respondent or indirectly through a lobbyist or other person acting on the respondent’s behalf) in an attempt to influence this procurement: (1) may result in a Respondent being deemed a non-responsive Respondent, and (2) may result in the Respondent not being awarded a contract.

Proposal Submission – Late proposals and proposals lacking the appropriate completed forms will be rejected. Proposals will only be accepted at the email address specified above. Faxed proposals will not be accepted. If changes are made to this solicitation, notifications will be sent to the primary contact provided to TSF from each Respondent. TSF bears no responsibility for data errors resulting from transmission or conversion processes. This solicitation does not commit TSF to pay any costs incurred in the preparation and submission of a proposal.

Proprietary Information – Careful consideration should be given before confidential information is submitted to TSF as part of your proposal. Review should include whether providing such information is critical for evaluating the proposal and whether general, non-confidential information may instead be adequate for review purposes. Information submitted to TSF that the Respondent wishes to have treated as proprietary and confidential trade secret information should be identified and labeled “Confidential” or “Proprietary” on each page at the time of disclosure. This information should include a written request to except it from disclosure, including a writing statement of the reasons why the information should be withheld. However, TSF cannot guarantee the confidentiality of any information submitted.

Contract Award – TSF anticipates making between three and five (3-5) Awards under this solicitation. It may award a contract based on initial applications without discussion, or following limited discussion or negotiations. Each offer should be submitted using the most favorable cost and technical terms. TSF may request additional data or material to support applications. TSF reserves the right to make more or fewer Awards – including no Awards – under this solicitation.

Limitation - This solicitation does not commit TSF to award a contract, pay any costs incurred in preparing a proposal, or to procure or contract for services or supplies. TSF reserves the right to accept or reject any or all proposals received, to negotiate with all qualified sources, or to cancel in part or in its entirety the solicitation when it is in TSF's best interest.

Disclosure Requirement - The Respondent shall disclose any indictment for any alleged felony, or any conviction for a felony within the past five years, under the laws of the United States or any state or territory of the United States, and shall describe circumstances for each.

When a Respondent is an association, partnership, corporation, or other organization, this disclosure requirement includes the organization and its officers, partners, and directors or members of any similarly governing body. If an indictment or conviction should come to the attention of TSF after the award of a contract, TSF may exercise its stop-work right pending further investigation, or terminate the agreement.

Equal Opportunity - In connection with the procurement of the specified services, the firm warrants that it shall not discriminate because of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, political affiliation, non-disabling physical and mental disability, political status, matriculation, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, genetic information, status as a veteran, physical handicap, age, marital status or any other characteristic protected by law.

Small and Disadvantaged Businesses - TSF shall use good faith efforts to provide contracting and procurement opportunities for Small and Disadvantaged Businesses (SDB). SDB categories include minority business enterprises (MBE), woman-owned business enterprises (WBE), small veteran and disabled veteran owned businesses, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), predominantly Hispanic Universities (HACUs), small businesses in Historically Under-utilized Zones (HUBZones) and private voluntary organizations (PVOs) principally operated and managed by economically disadvantaged individuals.