



**Illinois
Solar for All**

Bright Neighborhoods: Findings and Recommendations Report

2024-2025 PROGRAM YEAR

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Executive Summary

The two-year Bright Neighborhoods initiative (“initiative”) was designed to learn about best practices for increasing participation in the Illinois Solar for All: Residential Solar (Small) sub-program. The Bright Neighborhoods 2024-2025 initiative design was updated by the Illinois Solar for All (ILSFA) Program Administrator (Program Administrator) and the Illinois Power Agency (the Agency) to build on the foundation of learnings from its first initiative year (2023-2024) to continue to evaluate best practices that would increase participation and overcome identified barriers.

To prepare for the second year of Bright Neighborhoods, the Program Administrator enacted design updates to address challenges identified in the first year. These updates addressed varying interests in the community areas, high incidence of home repair needs, simplifying the participant journey, and aligning the goals and program expectations. The Program Administrator continued to engage with partnerships created in the first year and expanded their reach to other organizations to build local trust in the program. Through targeted community engagement with outreach and marketing, the initiative’s approach was to increase visibility and credibility in the Bright Neighborhoods areas.

The Program Administrator learned about many successful tactics, including the use of advertisements and direct engagement by community-based organizations, that brought interested participants to the initiative. Although the initiative’s 2024-2025 program year goals were not met, the experience offered valuable insights and opportunities for growth that will guide the recommendations in this report. These learnings highlight the success of marketing and community

engagement in building program awareness. They also highlight the areas for improvement after intake to support participants through their journey with verification and finding an Approved Vendor to reach an installation.

With these findings, the Program Administrator recommends a variety of updates to the Residential Solar (Small) sub-program, including evaluating and simplifying the income verification process and ensuring effective implementation of the Approved Vendor referral process. Additional recommendations center around updates to program outreach and promotion, including adding a community engagement plan to provide additional participant support and updating the program’s marketing approach. Backed by the initiative findings, the Program Administrator hopes to benefit the participants by implementing these recommendations to improve the program and increase residential solar participation.

Initiative Design

The Residential Solar Pilot, referred to as Bright Neighborhoods, was proposed in the Agency's 2022 Long-Term Renewable Resources Procurement Plan (the 2022 Long-Term Plan) to address the Residential Solar (Small) sub-program not yet reaching a level of participation that utilizes the full annual budget. Bright Neighborhoods was designed to identify and address barriers noted by stakeholders, including complex administrative processes, distrust in marketers, language barriers, and a lack of knowledge of solar power. Through this initiative, the Program Administrator and the Agency set out to answer the following question:

- **Can a vertically-integrated model, where the Program Administrator is responsible for customer acquisition, increase participation in the Residential Solar (Small) sub-program?**

The initiative design centered around shifting the role of outreach, marketing, and customer acquisition from the Approved Vendor to the Program Administrator. In addition, the Program Administrator selected three initiative community areas for the 2023-2024 program year: West Garfield Park-Chicago, Waukegan, and the Carbondale-Marion Micropolitan Area. A competitive Request for Proposal (RFP) process was conducted to select one Approved Vendor to work within each of the communities for each year of the initiative. Not only was the initiative meant to improve participation in the small residential program, but it also supported small and emerging businesses by prioritizing their selection in the RFP process (see the [2023-2024 Program Year Design](#) for more information).

Based on the learnings from the [2023-2024 program year](#), the Program Administrator adjusted aspects of the Bright Neighborhoods design for the 2024-2025 program year to expand on our understanding of the barriers faced by participants and to broaden the reach of the initiative. After receiving [stakeholder feedback](#) on proposed updates to the design, the Program Administrator made the following updates to the initiative this year:

1. Expanding the Chicago community area from just the West Garfield Park neighborhood to include most Chicago West Side neighborhoods, including Austin, Humboldt Park, East and West Garfield Park, and North and South Lawndale
2. Maintaining Waukegan and the Carbondale-Marion Micropolitan area
3. Updating the initiative goals per community area to:
 - a. 100-200 intake forms
 - b. 30-50 referrals to Approved Vendors

- c. 20-25 completed installations
 - d. Tracking Illinois Solar for All: Community Solar subscriptions in the income-eligible areas immediately surrounding Bright Neighborhoods communities
- 4. Integrating the enhanced site prescreening questions (assessing potential roof and electrical issues) into the income verification form instead of between two separate forms
- 5. Adding a preference to the Approved Vendor RFP for vendors willing to participate in the Home Repairs and Upgrades initiative
- 6. Adding an income verification method for residents living within a HUD-qualified census tract (QCT) to sign an income affidavit verifying their eligibility

The 2024-2025 Approved Vendor Request for Proposals led to the selection of three vendors, all willing to utilize the incentives available through the Home Repairs and Upgrades initiative. Additionally, two were small and emerging businesses, and one was a Minority-Owned Business, aligning with the program's goals of creating greater access for smaller firms and supporting participants with home repair needs necessary to complete a solar installation. The selected vendors were as follows: the Chicago Westside Neighborhoods - Sol Power Midwest, Waukegan - 1 Earth Solar, and Carbondale-Marion Micropolitan Area - Advanced Renewable Concepts.

The enrollment period, including the outreach, marketing, and customer acquisition efforts by the Program Administrator, began late September 2024 and ran through April 2025. During this time, various outreach and marketing tactics were deployed to reach prospective participants in their communities. The enrollment process of an interested participant was as follows:

- A potential participant found the program through outreach, marketing, or an avenue outside of the Program Administrator and submitted an intake form on the ILSFA Bright Neighborhoods webpage to begin their journey.
- The Program Administrator reviewed each participant on the intake list and whether they resided within a selected community area, the level of shading on their home, and if they lived within a 1–4-unit building to identify participants eligible for small residential solar through Bright Neighborhoods.
- Eligible small residential solar participants received marketing follow-ups, which included a series of emails, a phone call, and a direct mailer. These follow-ups encouraged prospective participants to move forward with the next step of verifying their income.
- Once an individual was verified as income eligible to participate in ILSFA, they were referred by the Program Administrator through an email to the Approved Vendor selected for their community area.

Implementation

Outreach Strategy

The outreach and community engagement strategy for Bright Neighborhoods focused on leveraging partnerships with community-based organizations (CBOs), local leaders, and ILSFA Grassroots Educators with an emphasis on providing solar education in the selected communities. This strategy aligned the Program Administrator with established organizations to help build trust in the program, address the barriers of distrust in marketers and lack of education around solar energy, and convert event attendees into prospective participants through intake submissions. The outreach strategy also included engagement with eligible individuals previously interested in ILSFA but had not begun an installation yet and coordination with similar programs providing energy-related services, like energy efficiency or weatherization.

Outreach Tactics

LEVERAGING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

The initiative's main outreach strategy focused on identifying local organizations and leaders who could support the initiative to build trust and provide solar education to counteract the predatory practices of some other energy service marketers. These local organizations included local elected officials, houses of worship, community action agencies, city sustainability committees, and nonprofits focused on providing energy-related services or other community social services. The support from each partner varied depending on their individual capacity, ranging from promotion of the initiative through their social media channels, posting an initiative flyer in their space, or inviting the Program Administrator to table at a resource fair or present at an event.

The outreach team also leveraged the program's relationship with ILSFA Grassroots Educators in the Chicago area and the Carbondale-Marion area to engage with community residents. These Grassroots Educators have many years of experience working in the community and have established relationships with many residents who may be interested and eligible to participate in ILSFA. Because of this, the Bright Neighborhoods outreach team planned and attended events hosted by the Grassroots Educator to begin building connections with prospective participants, creating new leads.

ENGAGING PREVIOUSLY ELIGIBLE ILSFA PARTICIPANTS

The Program Administrator identified an opportunity to engage with prospective participants in the Bright Neighborhoods communities who had submitted an income

verification form for ILSFA within the last three years but had not yet worked with an Approved Vendor. This included participants who had no affiliation with Bright Neighborhoods and were unable to connect with an active Approved Vendor in their area. It also included those who were verified as eligible in the first year of the initiative but were still without an installation. The Program Administrator used direct engagement through emails and phone calls to encourage each participant to continue in the program by re-verifying their income (if needed) to receive a referral to their community's selected Bright Neighborhoods Approved Vendor.

PROGRAM COORDINATION

Community residents who have already participated in energy efficiency or weatherization programs may be more inclined to participate in ILSFA. Because of this, the Program Administrator identified participants from other programs they administer, such as building retrofits, and identified prospective participants who were interested in additional ways to save energy. The Program Administrator engaged these prospective participants through educational emails and phone calls to explain the benefits of solar energy and the Bright Neighborhoods program.

The ILSFA Program Administrator also coordinated with an electrification program they administer in the Chicago area to distribute information to interested residents. The electrification program team identified specific individuals who would be interested in solar energy to give direct referrals to the Bright Neighborhoods team. Once the electrification program team made the warm handoff, the Bright Neighborhoods team engaged with the residents through phone calls to encourage them to take the next step with income verification.

Marketing Strategy

In its second year, the Bright Neighborhoods marketing strategy was guided by valuable lessons and audience research gathered during the 2023-2024 program year. The program's marketing team implemented a targeted, multi-channel approach to attract new participants. The strategy focused on enhancing awareness of ILSFA to strengthen legitimacy, build trust, and engage the audience.

The marketing messages highlighted key themes like savings on electric bills, promoting fair business practices, offering dedicated support, and addressing climate change. The messages were crafted to align with audience priorities, motivations, and aspirations.

Marketing Tactics

To act on the marketing strategy, the program deployed integrated marketing tactics to promote Bright Neighborhoods and ultimately enroll homeowners in 1-4-unit

households. The tactical approach was split into two phases: launch tactics and secondary promotional tactics. A phased approach was strategically designed to build awareness, engage, and convert the target audience by having them fill out the intake form.

LAUNCH TACTICS

To support the successful rollout of Bright Neighborhoods, a series of integrated tactics were deployed beginning in September 2024 and sustained throughout the campaign.

- **Landing Page:** To launch Bright Neighborhoods, a dedicated and enhanced landing page was deployed on the ILSFA website. Built with insights from audience research, the webpage emphasized the ease of participation with a streamlined process and prominently featured the intake form. Key features included a how-it-works section detailing the steps to participate, a section outlining the financial benefits of enrolling in Bright Neighborhoods, and FAQs addressing common concerns to reduce friction in the decision-making process. The page was offered in English and Spanish.
- **Expanded Share Kits:** Comprehensive share kits were tailored for community partners and elected officials (including Aldermen and Mayors' offices). The kits included social media graphics and captions, flyers, and newsletter articles. These resources enhanced the credibility of ILSFA by empowering partners to promote Bright Neighborhoods to their communities.
- **Outreach Materials:** Curated materials to support one-to-one and event-based outreach efforts. Materials included Solar 101 presentations, community-focused presentations, event flyers, and overview flyers.
- **Email Marketing:**
 - **Promotional Emails:** To cultivate interest in Bright Neighborhoods, the Program Administrator emailed contacts on Illinois Solar for All's email lists to announce the initiative's relaunch, promote upcoming events, and reinforce the value of participating in Bright Neighborhoods.
 - **Retention Emails:** The Program Administrator also created a series of automated emails sent to residents who submitted the intake form. Sent over three months, these email messages provided clear next steps, encouragement, and reminders to continue with the process to increase the number of installed projects.
- **Organic Social Media:** The Program Administrator posted organic social media content on ILSFA channels to broaden awareness and drive audience engagement. Posts were strategically deployed across Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn to maximize reach to ILSFA's followers. Content included information about the initiative, upcoming events, and the benefits of participation, such as reducing electricity bills. Consistent posting helped maintain visibility throughout the Bright Neighborhoods enrollment period while fostering credibility through the program's channels. Bright Neighborhoods posts and stories were featured across ILSFA channels three to four times a month.

SECONDARY PROMOTIONAL TACTICS

To maintain momentum beyond the initial launch, the Program Administrator implemented secondary promotional tactics throughout the enrollment period to reinforce awareness and drive continued engagement.

- **Direct Mail Campaign:** A targeted postcard mailing was executed using the USPS Every Door Direct Mail (EDDM) service. This approach enabled the program to reach households in the Bright Neighborhoods community areas based on zip code and income criteria, maximizing reach among qualified potential participants. The postcard featured concise, compelling messaging designed to highlight the benefits of Bright Neighborhoods, drive traffic to the webpage, and encourage residents to complete the intake form. Direct mail complemented the digital tactics to boost awareness of the initiative.
- **Direct Mail to Interested Households:** A direct mail flyer was sent to residents who filled out the intake form but did not complete the process. The flyers encouraged these potential participants to fill out the income verification form.
- **Digital Advertising Campaign:** The program launched digital advertising in March and April 2025. The goal of the advertising campaign was to drive visits to the landing page and generate intake form submissions to increase Bright Neighborhoods participation. The advertising strategy leveraged digital media channels with a hyper-targeted approach to increase awareness and generate interest using messages focused on the savings benefits of Bright Neighborhoods. During the ad period, the Program Administrator assessed ad performance across all channels and pivoted from Google Search to ads on Google Display Network and YouTube.
 - Channels:
 - **Meta (Facebook + Instagram)** – Featured Static, Carousel, Reel ads (Graphic and video ads)
 - **Google (Display campaign)** – Featured GIFs (digital billboard ads)
 - Google Display Network Ads replaced Google Search Ads on March 19, 2025, due to limited search volume. This was a strategic pivot to broaden reach and build awareness.
 - **YouTube (Video campaign)** – Featured YouTube Shorts (Short video ads)
 - YouTube Shorts replaced Google Search Ads on March 19, 2025, due to limited search volume. This was a strategic pivot to broaden reach and build awareness.
 - YouTube Shorts played a dual role —building brand awareness and driving lead generation. By leveraging YouTube Shorts, the program was able to engage with the audience, making YouTube a key contributor to both visibility and performance.
 - Languages:
 - **Chicago and Waukegan** – English & Spanish
 - **Southern Illinois** – English only

Data and Metrics

Overview of Metrics

The following metrics and data give an overview of Bright Neighborhoods' performance. They outline results from the tactics taken to enhance the participant experience and journey, including the number of intake forms received, how participants heard about the initiative, the number of income verification forms submitted, and the movement of participants through their journey. The data shows the efficacy of different outreach and marketing tactics used and highlights where barriers to participation remain.

BREAKDOWN OF INTAKE FORMS RECEIVED

The first goal of the initiative was to reach 100-200 intake forms in each Bright Neighborhoods area. The number of intake forms received in each community shows the impact of tactics used to engage participants. Although outreach and marketing efforts targeted the three selected community areas, Bright Neighborhoods promotion also increased engagement from residents in other communities. The results in all communities create an opportunity for the program to direct future marketing and community engagement towards these areas to encourage interested residents to participate.

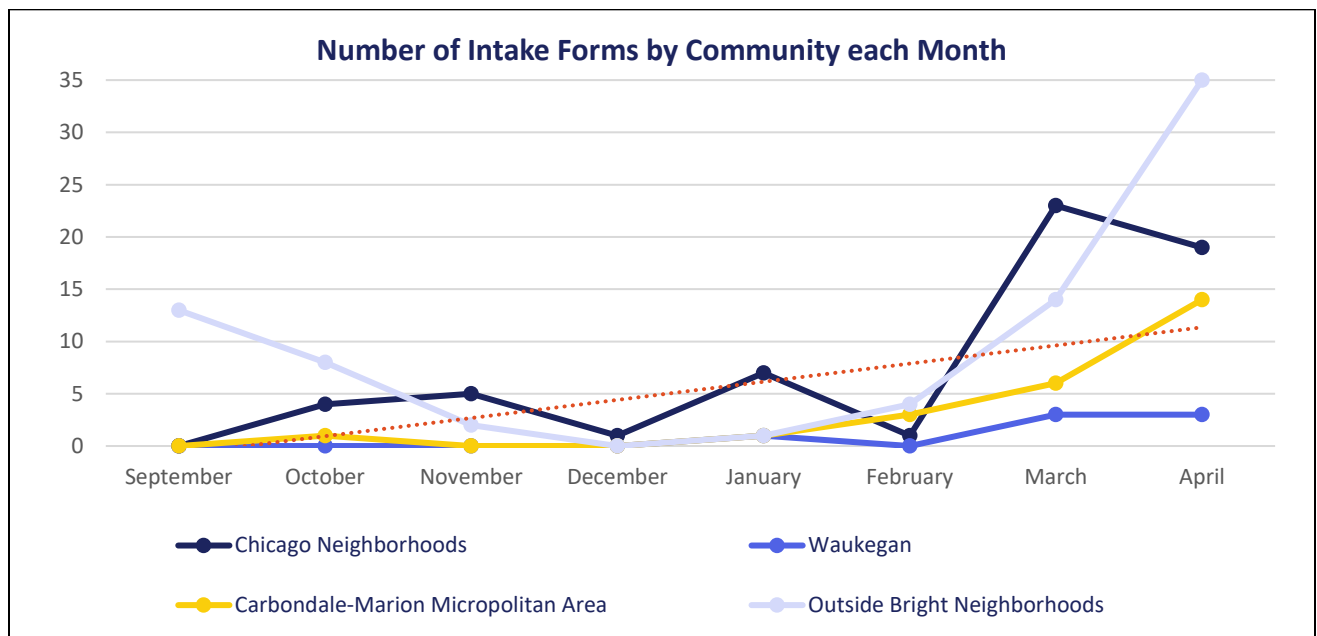


Figure 1: Intake forms by community area from September 2024 through April 2025

Total intakes: 169		
	Bright Neighborhoods Area	Areas outside of Bright Neighborhoods
Total intake forms completed	92	77
Intakes referred to Community Solar (shading/unit type)	(20)	(16)
Intakes ineligible for ILSFA ¹ or no longer interested	(7)	(2)
Total eligible intakes for residential solar	65	59

Figure 2: Intake forms by community type and program eligibility

Eligible Residential Solar Intakes by Community	
Chicago Neighborhoods	45
Waukegan	5
Carbondale-Marion Micropolitan Area	15

Figure 3: Bright Neighborhoods participants are eligible for Residential Solar by community area

¹ Someone ineligible for ILSFA is based off income and residence in the state of Illinois.

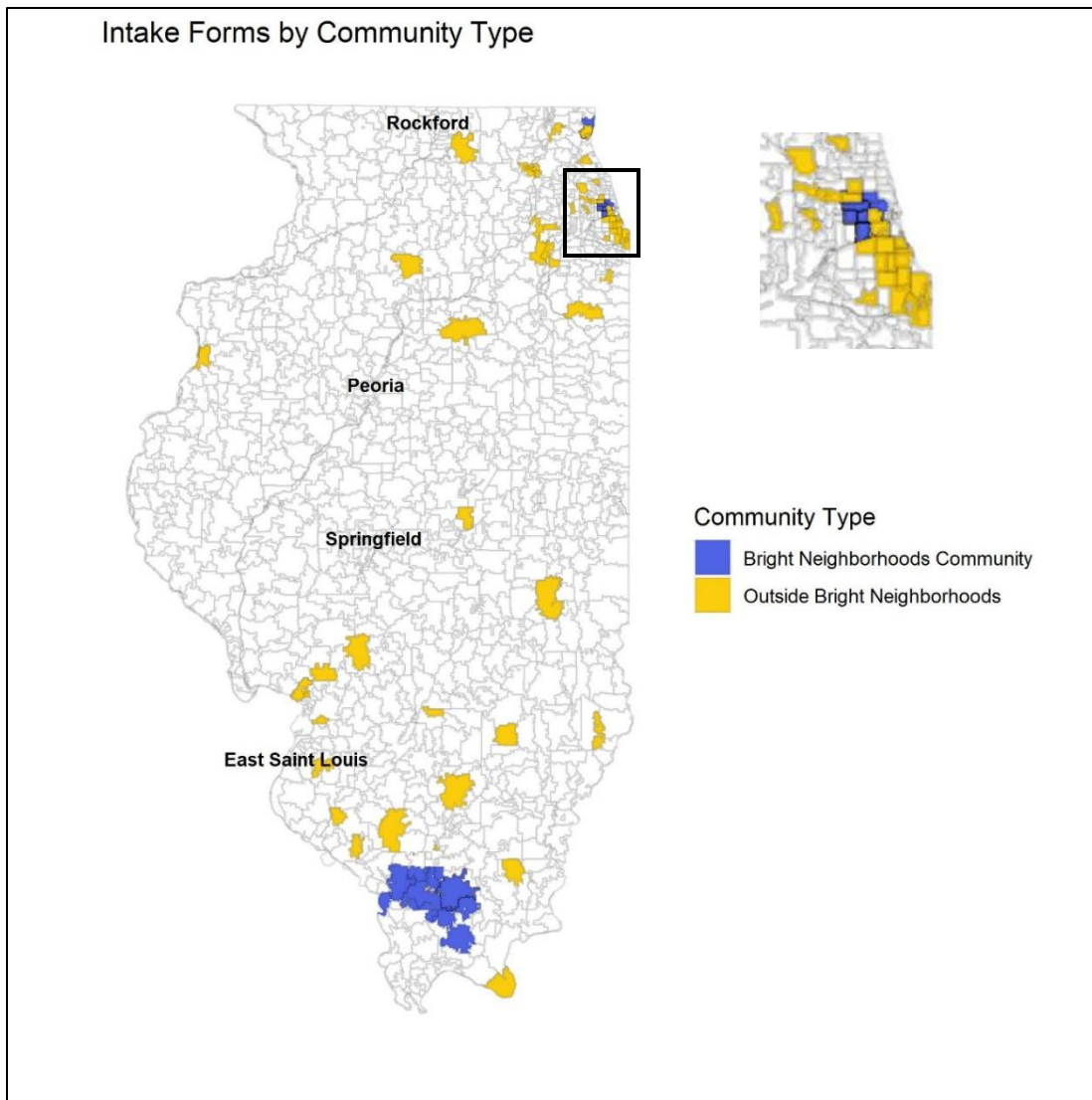


Figure 4: Map distribution of received intake forms from Bright Neighborhoods communities and non-Bright Neighborhoods communities by zip code across Illinois

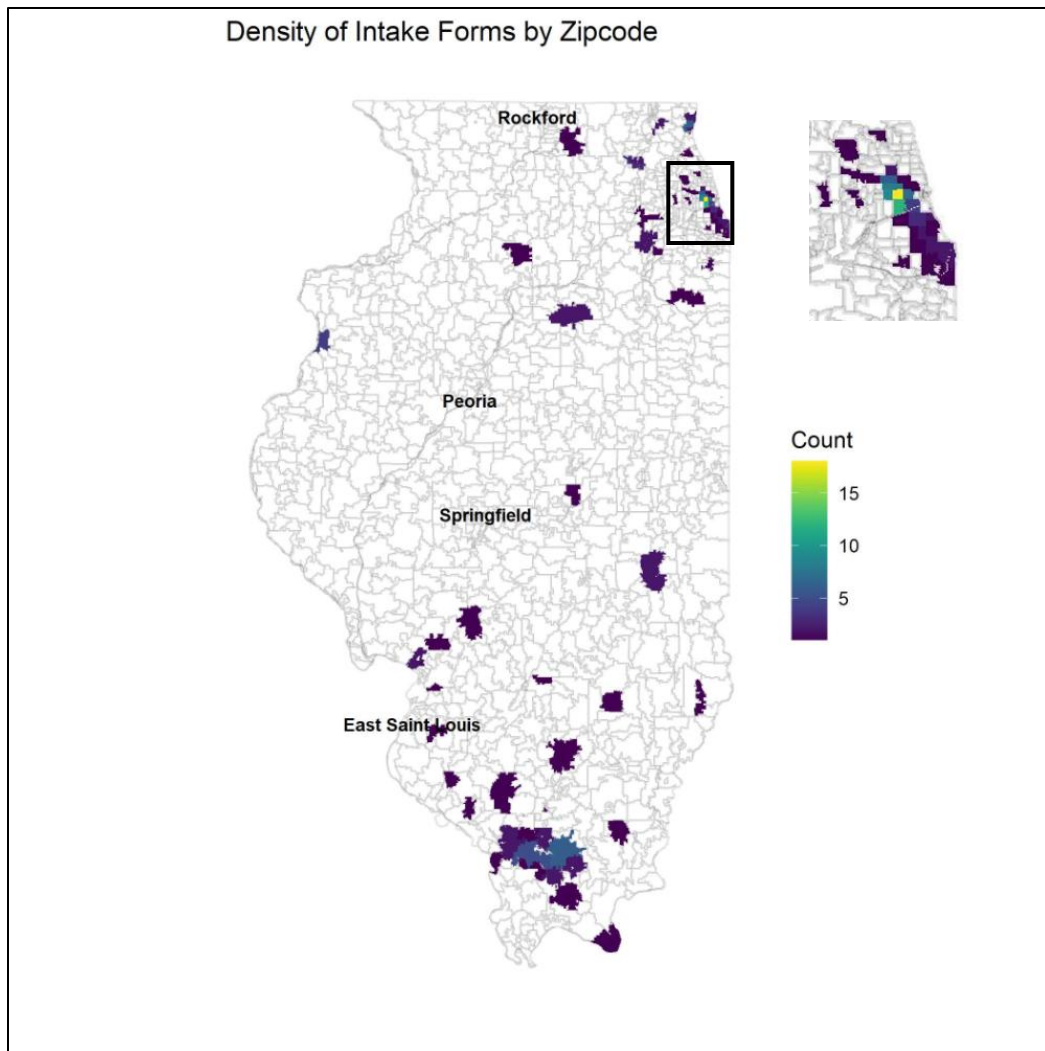


Figure 5: Map showing the density of intake forms received from Bright Neighborhoods and non-Bright Neighborhoods communities by zip code

HOW HEARD

Understanding how participants discovered Bright Neighborhoods is key to evaluating outreach and marketing effectiveness. The “How Heard” field on the intake form is participant-reported data, offering one perspective on the participant journey.

To validate this participant-reported data, the program team utilized Google Analytics 4, a web analytics service used to track website metrics (such as page views and conversions), to track the performance of the marketing and outreach tactics, which is more reliable. Based on Google Analytics 4, 94 intake forms were directly attributable to digital advertisements, significantly exceeding participant-reported data. Participants exposed to digital ads may have selected “website” or “social media” rather than

“advertisement,” depending on how they perceived the source that directed them to the intake form.

While advertisements and digital marketing account for most of the intake forms, the Grassroots Educators also had great success with direct referrals and direct engagement with the Program Administrator. The remaining tactics appear to be less effective in encouraging interested participants to move forward with eligibility.

	Total intakes	% of Intakes
ILSFA website	34	20%
Advertisement	33	20%
Social Media (Organic and Ads)	27	16%
Email	20	12%
Speaking with a GE	17	10%
Speaking with the Program Administrator	11	7%
Attending an event	5	3%
Other	5	3%
Word of mouth	4	2%
Speaking with an AV	3	2%
News Media	3	2%
Elevate Program Coordination	2	1%
Local organization (Not GE)	2	1%
Mailer or flyer	2	1%
Local elected official or alderman	1	1%

Figure 6: Breakdown of participants’ understanding of how they heard about Bright Neighborhoods

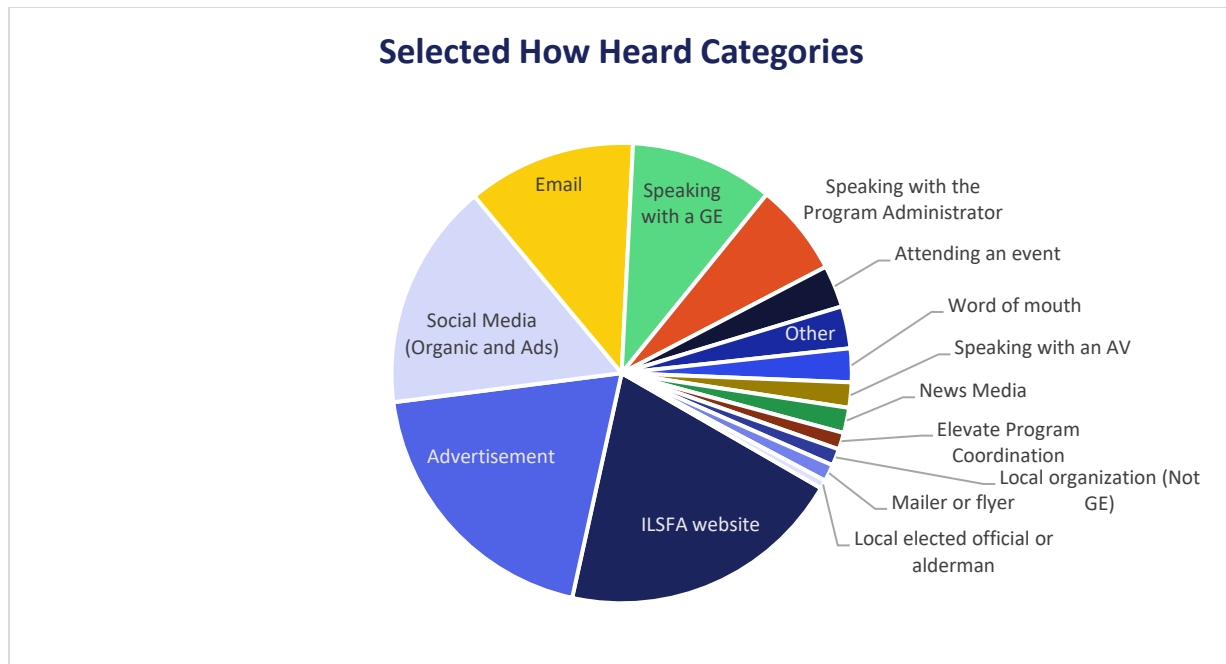


Figure 7: Visual representation of the “How Heard” responses from the Bright Neighborhoods intake form

INCOME VERIFICATION

The second step in the participant journey with Bright Neighborhoods was to verify income eligibility to participate in the ILSFA program. This data shows the progression of income verifications and the breakdown of methods used, including the method of an income affidavit for participants residing within a United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Qualified Census Tract (QCT), only used in Bright Neighborhoods 2024-2025. This affidavit did not require additional documentation like other verification methods do, thus simplifying the income verification process.

Income Verification Status	All Submitted Forms by Status
Complete - eligible	17
Pending documents/information	4
Unresponsive	3

Income Verification Methods	Number of Each Method Selected
Household proof of enrollment	8
<i>Social security benefits</i>	4
<i>SNAP</i>	2
<i>LIHEAP</i>	1
<i>Utility energy grant</i>	1

Income affidavit - HUD QCT	5
Credit reporting/Income tax return	5
Medicaid	4
Incomplete	1
Income affidavit - Zero income	1

Figure 8: Breakdown of the submitted income verification forms, showing the status of each and the methods selected for verification

PARTICIPANT JOURNEY DATA

Because the participant acquisition was consolidated with the Program Administrator, Bright Neighborhoods allows for a closer look at how participants move through their journey with ILSFA. This is important because it shows the marketing and outreach tactics have worked well to bring interested participants into the program by submitting intake forms. The chart below also shows where barriers to participation remain in the program, specifically at income verification. There was a significant drop-off of participants after intake, with only 37% of eligible participants submitting an income verification form. As shown in the previous section and the table below, most participants with a submitted income verification form moved forward as eligible, with only 29% of participants dropping off after submitting their form.

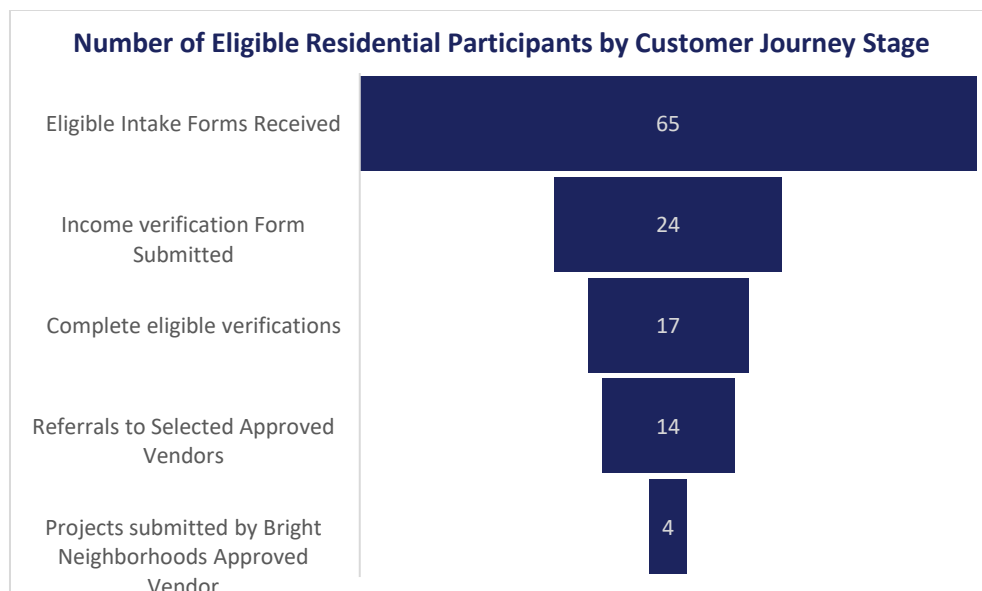


Figure 9: Visual representation of the stages of the customer journey showing the number of participants who reached each stage

The second goal of the initiative was to refer 30-50 eligible participants to each selected Approved Vendor. The table below depicts the number of referrals by community area, as well as any projects removed from the pipeline by the Approved Vendor, with their reasoning. Because participation in the Home Repairs and Upgrades initiative was

included in the 2024-2025 RFP for Approved Vendors, there were fewer projects removed from the vendor pipelines due to repair needs in this program year compared to last year.

Referrals to Approved Vendor	Total
Chicago Neighborhoods	3
Waukegan	2
Carbondale-Marion	9
Projects Removed from Pipeline by Approved Vendors	Total
Chicago Neighborhoods	3
<i>Vendor unable to serve participants</i>	2
<i>The participant is unable to move forward</i>	1
Waukegan	0
Carbondale-Marion Micropolitan Area	5
<i>Vendor dropped -roof size/shading</i>	3
<i>Participant dropped AV</i>	2
Total Dropped	8

Figure 10: Breakdown of the referrals to the Approved Vendors and any projects that were dropped by the vendor

The third goal of the initiative was to complete 20-25 installations in each community area. The Approved Vendor in the Carbondale-Marion Micropolitan Area is the only one that has submitted projects. Of the four submitted projects, two utilized additional incentives from the Home Repairs and Upgrades initiative. The Waukegan vendor continues to work with their referrals to design an installation. Additionally, of the 59 participants who submitted an intake form but reside outside of the selected communities, one has received a small residential solar installation. The low number of installations within this list of ineligible initiative participants also suggests that the biggest barrier to participation is at income verification and finding an active vendor.

Number of Projects Submitted	Total
Chicago Neighborhoods	0
Waukegan	0
Carbondale-Marion	4

Figure 11: Number of Bright Neighborhoods projects submitted in each community area

Although the initiative selected specific Approved Vendors to take on the referrals, some participants who were removed from their pipeline are now working with different ILSFA Approved Vendors. As referenced above in Figure 10, some participants were removed because of shading concerns, because the vendor was unable to serve the participants, or because the participants elected to move forward with a different

vendor. In these instances, the Program Administrator was notified of these projects and followed up with the participants to provide them with information about other vendors in their area who may be able to take on their projects.

Of the five removed projects in the Carbondale-Marion Micropolitan Area, four have been submitted by a nearby vendor, with two of those projects utilizing Home Repairs and Upgrades incentives. The two participants in the Chicago area are continuing to search for a new Approved Vendor to support their projects.

COMMUNITY SOLAR SUBSCRIPTIONS

During the initial review of an intake form, the Program Administrator reviewed the potential shading on the home to determine if the participant was eligible for Residential Solar. Out of the 169 total intake forms, 36 were immediately referred to Community Solar.

Apart from these referrals, the Program Administrator was interested in tracking new Community Solar subscriptions around the Bright Neighborhoods communities. This final goal was to track Community Solar subscriptions from income-eligible communities immediately neighboring the initiative areas, identified in the 2024-2025 Initiative Design, to assess potential spillover of the engagement tactics. This data shows general interest in the ILSFA program around the communities, but these subscriptions cannot definitively be attributed to the spillover effects of the initiative's tactics.

	Number of Community Solar Subscriptions (Sept 2024-May 2025)
Around the Chicago Area	
Cicero	5
Garfield Ridge-Chicago	2
Archer Heights-Chicago	0
Brighton Park-Chicago	5
McKinley Park-Chicago	5
Bridgeport-Chicago	3
New City-Chicago	0
Belmont Cragin-Chicago	16
Hermosa-Chicago	1
Total in Chicago	37
Waukegan	
North Chicago	5
Park City	0
Beach Park	1
Zion	4

Total in Waukegan	10
Carbondale-Marion Area	
Randolph County	1
Perry County	0
Franklin County	5
Saline County	7
Pope County	0
Massac County	8
Pulaski County	0
Union County	0
Total in the Carbondale-Marion Area	21
Total Number of Subscriptions	68

Figure 12: This table shows the number of Community Solar subscriptions from September 2024-May 2025 in income-eligible areas immediately surrounding Bright Neighborhoods areas.

Outreach Metrics

These outreach metrics show how the Program Administrator interacted with participants in the three Bright Neighborhoods communities, including partnerships with local organizations, the number of events attended or hosted by the Program Administrator, the number of prospective participant interactions at events, and the number of participant engagements through coordination with other programs. The data can inform future recommendations for further community engagement on behalf of Illinois Solar for All to continue educating the public to address barriers of distrust in solar energy.

PARTNERSHIPS ESTABLISHED

Outreach in both years focused on establishing partnerships with local organizations that could support the initiative to create a larger presence around the initiative and the ILSFA program. The Program Administrator leveraged some of the partnerships created during the first year of the initiative for support, but also focused on building new relationships. These partnerships included non-profit organizations, local elected officials, city staffers, houses of worship, and a Community Action Agency. Each trusted relationship supported the initiative differently based on their capacity, including digital and physical marketing promotion, or by inviting the Program Administrator to co-host educational events or table at a resource fair.

	Number of partnerships
Chicago Neighborhoods	11
Waukegan	10

Carbondale-Marion Area	8
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Figure 13: The number of local organizations and leaders who provided support to the Bright Neighborhoods outreach efforts in each community

EVENT DATA

The types of events hosted or attended by the Program Administrator varied by community, and the table below shows the number of events.

	Number of events attended (tabling)	Number of events hosted by the Program Administrator	Number of events co-hosted with partner/GE	Total Number of Events
Chicago Neighborhoods	15	5	5	25
Waukegan	7	9	1	17
Carbondale-Marion Area	3	5	1	9

Figure 14: The breakdown of events attended and hosted for Bright Neighborhoods in each community

PARTICIPANT INTERACTIONS

Engaging with prospective participants at events is beneficial in building a relationship with residents to begin to build trust in the program. This table shows the number of participant interactions at different events, where "Number of Event Registrants/Attendees" represents educational events hosted by the Program Administrator or partner, and "Number of Tabling Interactions" represents events where the Program Administrator engaged with prospective participants at a designated table.

	Number of Event Registrants	Number of Event Attendees	Number of Tabling Interactions	Total Number of Interactions
Chicago Neighborhoods	32	19	165	216
Waukegan	60	31	40	131
Carbondale-Marion Area	2	1	60	36

Figure 15: The number of anticipated and actual participant interactions at outreach events

ENGAGING OTHER PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANTS

Another tactic involved engaging with other prospective participants, either by reaching out to those previously eligible for ILSFA who had not yet received an installation, or by coordinating efforts with related energy programs. Working with previously eligible ILSFA participants is helpful because their interest in the program may make them more

likely to continue the process after an additional touch from the Program Administrator. Re-engaging with them can also help maintain trust in the program.

Coordinating with energy-related programs may help increase interest in ILSFA enrollment. The type of initial touch used in this tactic showed varying responses from participants. Participants typically responded more to the warm handoffs rather than the cold calls, leading to more intake forms. Each warm handoff included a three-way email between the participant, the Program Manager from the energy program, and an ILSFA representative. The Program Administrator conducted the cold calls to a list of participants who previously noted interest in other ways to save energy.

Previously Eligible ILSFA Participants			
	Number of Prospective Participants (Bright Neighborhoods 2023-24)	Number of Prospective Participants (income verified with ILSFA)	Number of Participants Referred to Approved Vendor
Chicago Neighborhoods	2	6	2
Waukegan	1	1	1
Carbondale-Marion Area	6	6	5

Figure 16: Number of previously income-eligible ILSFA participants, either through Bright Neighborhoods 2023-24 or through the general program, located in Bright Neighborhoods communities engaged with by the Program Administrator.

Program Coordination (Retrofit – Chicago only)		
	Number of Prospective Participants Cold Called	Number of Intake Forms Received
Chicago Neighborhoods	67	1
Program Coordination (Electrification- Chicago only)		
	Number of Warm Hand-Offs	Number of Intake Forms Received
Chicago Neighborhoods	3	2

Figure 17: Participants from other energy-related Elevate programs supporting coordination with the ILSFA Program Administrator

Marketing Metrics

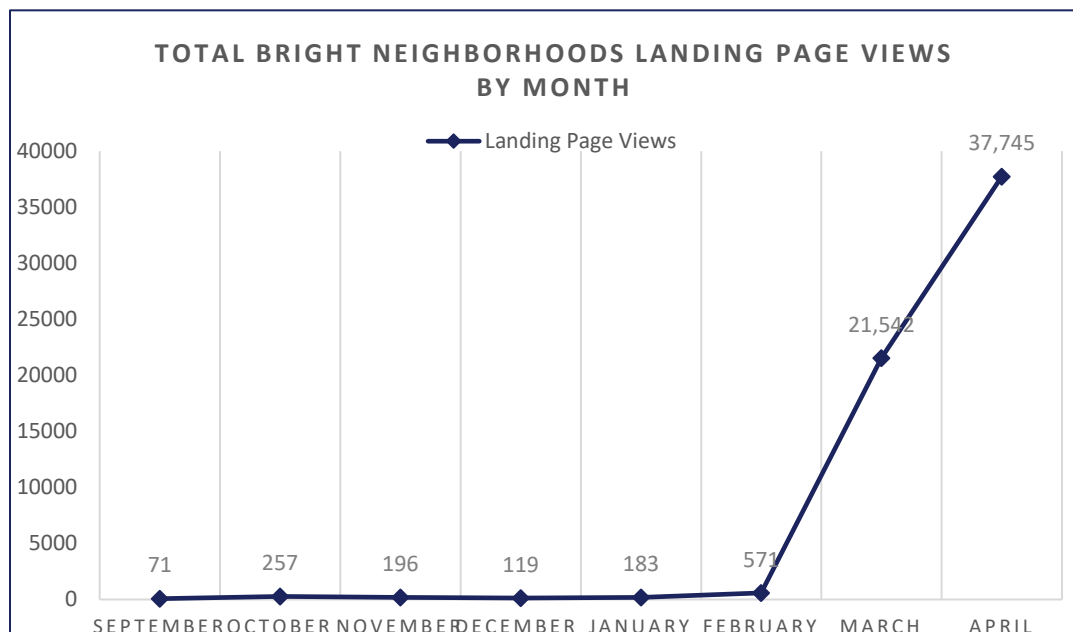
Marketing metrics provide valuable insight into the effectiveness of the marketing strategy. The team could assess which tactics resonated most with residents in the select community areas by tracking performance indicators such as website visits, email open and click-through rates, social media engagement, direct mail response, and advertising engagement.

These data points validate high-performing approaches, such as digital advertising, and highlight opportunities to incorporate tactics to support resident engagement in the Residential Solar (Small) sub-program. Marketing results from the Bright Neighborhoods initiative can help guide future messaging, tactical approaches, and timing to better connect with the income-eligible audience and improve conversion outcomes.

LANDING PAGE

The Bright Neighborhoods landing page received 60,684 views, making it the most visited page on the ILSFA website. This is more than double the views of the ILSFA homepage, which had 25,872 views during the same period.

September 2024 – April 2025	
Total Bright Neighborhoods Landing Page Views <i>(Total number of views from people who visited the Bright Neighborhoods landing page.)</i>	Total Number of Users <i>(Total number of people who visited the Bright Neighborhoods landing page.)</i>
60,684	45,793



Indicators of Marketing Performance

- The large number of views, paired with the large number of users, indicates the success of the marketing tactics in directing new potential participants to the Bright Neighborhoods landing page.
- The results also validate the strategy of using a dedicated landing page for quick action by the potential participant (filling out the intake form). The high traffic volume suggests that residents were motivated to learn more from the marketing tactics deployed.

- The large spike in new visitors to the landing page in March and April is a direct result of paid digital advertising.

What does this data mean?

- Moving forward, the ILSFA program can benefit from leveraging multi-channel promotions that drive traffic to the sub-program landing pages.
- Digital advertisements make it easier for the ILSFA program to reach new residents, increase program visibility, and create qualified leads. To increase participation, these lessons can be applied to all of the sub-programs.

EMAIL MARKETING

Email marketing played a vital role in promoting Bright Neighborhoods and reinforcing key program information and upcoming events by providing timely reminders. Promotional emails were sent to almost 4,000 email subscribers. Retention emails were sent to individual residents who expressed interest in Bright Neighborhoods by submitting an intake form.

September 2024 – April 2025	
Promotional Emails	
Number of emails sent to almost 4,000 email subscribers	10
Click Rate (Percentage of recipients that clicked on the emails)	1.96%
Website Visits from Promotional Emails	182
Email Journey: Retention Emails for Eligible Participants	
Initial Email	
Number of emails sent to individual residents	60
Click Rate (Percentage of recipients that clicked on the emails)	5.11%
Follow-Up Email #1	
Number of emails sent to individual residents	45
Click Rate (Percentage of recipients that clicked on the emails)	5.87%
Follow-Up Email #2	
Number of emails sent to individual residents	12
Click Rate (Percentage of recipients that clicked on the emails)	6.25%

Indicators of Marketing Performance

- Bright Neighborhoods promotional emails achieved click-through rates of 1% to 3%, considered a strong performance range based on [Salesforce Marketing](#) benchmarks.
- Bright Neighborhoods retention emails achieved click-through rates between 2% and 5%, considered a strong performance range based on [Salesforce Marketing](#) benchmarks.

What does this data mean?

- Email marketing met or exceeded general email standards for clicks, meaning that the content in the emails resonated with the audience and drove them to act (clicking links to visit the landing page).
- The data from the Bright Neighborhoods initiative proves that email is a valuable channel to promote the ILSFA program to residents.
- A mix of promotional and retention emails is most successful when deployed strategically in a series to reinforce messages and engage residents to participate.

ORGANIC SOCIAL MEDIA

The launch of Illinois Solar for All’s social media channels in September 2024 added a valuable channel to promote Bright Neighborhoods. Throughout the promotional period, posts across Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn generated strong impressions and engagement.

September 2024 – April 2025	
Organic Social Media	
Number of Posts (All Channels)	39
Overall Impressions (All Channels) <i>The total number of times the content is displayed to users on a platform.</i>	958
Average Engagement Rate (All Channels) <i>The average number of various actions, such as likes, comments, clicks, and shares.</i>	8.20%
Number of Users on All Channels <i>The number of users who engaged with Bright Neighborhood posts.</i>	83

Indicators of Marketing Performance

- According to data from Hootsuite, average engagement rates across all industries on social media range from 2.9% to 4.2%. Bright Neighborhoods posts reached an average engagement rate of 8.2%, signaling that marketing messages and related graphics were relevant and compelling to the target audience.

What does this data mean?

- Illinois Solar for All’s social channels are new and gaining traction. The overall impressions, users, and engagement rate suggest that organic social media can be a useful tool to market directly to residents while building awareness and boosting Illinois Solar for All’s profile as a trusted resource for income-eligible residents adopting solar.

DIRECT MAIL

The USPS Every Door Direct Mail (EDDM) postcard was distributed to 1,202 households in the targeted community areas. Follow-up mailers were sent to residents who submitted an intake form but did not take additional steps to complete the process.

They were the last step in a follow-up journey that included phone calls and emails. These mailers garnered 11 QR code visits to the website.

USPS Campaign	
Number of Mailers Sent	1,202
Website Visits - Chicago	5
Website Visits - Carbondale	3
Website Visits - Waukegan	0
Intake Form Submissions from Mailer	2
Follow-up to Interested Households	
Number of Mailers Sent	44
QR Code Visits to Website	11

Indicators of Marketing Performance

- Direct mail generated some awareness and landing page visits, but intake completions fell below expectations.

What does this data mean?

- The USPS Every Door Direct Mail service was useful in reaching new residents. However, a single mailing likely provided insufficient exposure to drive meaningful action.
- The follow-up mailer data indicates that residents did act after receiving an additional marketing touchpoint directly to their home.
- Based on these results, Illinois Solar for All may benefit from a multi-touch direct mail campaign, delivering reminders or follow-up mailers over a longer timeline to reinforce messaging and to prompt action.

DIGITAL ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN

The digital advertising campaign performed well, generating 4.7 million impressions, 74,582 clicks anywhere on the ad, 1,398 "Get Started" clicks on the ad's button, and 94 intake forms.

February 28, 2025 – April 30, 2025					
Channel	Impressions	Clicks <i>Number of clicks on the ad</i>	Click-Through Rate <i>Percentage of people who clicked on the ad</i>	Get Started Clicks <i>Number of clicks on the button</i>	Views
Overall	4,767,037	74,582	1.56%	1,398	107,233

Meta (Facebook + Instagram)	2,868,158	30,863	1.08%	76	N/A
Chicago	1,736,974 <i>English:</i> 734,134 <i>Spanish:</i> 1,002,840	16,019 <i>English:</i> 9,974 <i>Spanish:</i> 6,045	.92% <i>English:</i> 1.36% <i>Spanish:</i> .60%	40	N/A
Waukegan	694,651 <i>English:</i> 158,802 <i>Spanish:</i> 535,849	6,438 <i>English:</i> 3,508 <i>Spanish:</i> 2,930	.93% <i>English:</i> 1.36% <i>Spanish:</i> .60%	11	N/A
Southern Illinois	436,533	8,406	1.93%	25	N/A
Google Display Network (March 19 Launch)	195,184	1,686	.86%	275	N/A
Chicago	141,442 <i>English:</i> 97,007 <i>Spanish:</i> 44,435	1,217	.86% <i>English:</i> 7.4% <i>Spanish:</i> 1.13%	199	N/A
Waukegan	20,467 <i>English:</i> 12,642 <i>Spanish:</i> 7,825	119	.58% <i>English:</i> .65% <i>Spanish:</i> .47%	16	N/A
Southern Illinois	33,275	350	1.05%	60	N/A
YouTube	1,703,695	42,033	2.47%	1,047	107,233
Chicago	1,117,086 <i>English:</i> 745,170 <i>Spanish:</i> 371,916	29,364	2.63% <i>English:</i> 2.63% <i>Spanish:</i> 2.63%	789	N/A
Waukegan	187,974 <i>English:</i> 109,241	4,215	2.24% <i>English:</i> 1.77%	100	N/A

	<i>Spanish:</i> 78,733		<i>Spanish:</i> 2.89%		
Southern Illinois	389,635	8,454	2.12%	158	N/A

The Bright Neighborhoods campaign targeted a specific audience within a small geographic area for a niche industry, making standardized benchmark data unavailable. The program’s marketing contractor utilized publicly available data closely aligned with the channel and industry to gauge campaign performance, using it as a proxy benchmark.

	Facebook	Google Display Network	YouTube
Proxy Click-Through Rate Benchmark (Home & Home Improvement)	1.26%	.49%	.31%

Indicators of Marketing Performance

- The digital ad results across all categories are a strong indicator that the channels and messages used resonated with the target audience.
- The large number of impressions indicates that millions of residents saw Bright Neighborhoods ads, making them more familiar with the Illinois Solar for All name and what the program offers. That familiarity builds awareness, trust, and long-term value for the program.
- The digital advertisements exceeded the proxy benchmarks for click-through rate, which means that the ad creative and messaging caused the audience to act by visiting the landing page.

What does this data mean?

- Most notably, digital ads drove the highest number of intake form submissions compared to all other marketing and outreach tactics, clearly positioning digital advertisements as the most effective driver of qualified leads.
- The awareness built from digital advertisements can create long-term growth for Illinois Solar for All. When someone is finally ready to act—sign up, or engage—they’re much more likely to access solar through a brand they’ve seen repeatedly. Impressions are like planting seeds. The results from millions of impressions may not turn immediately into intake forms, but they’re setting the stage for future success.
- The Illinois Solar for All program can benefit from and should prioritize digital ads, with continued investment in targeting, optimization, and compelling creative to sustain this level of performance.

Cost of the Implementation

The Program Administrator took on the costs of outreach, marketing, and participant acquisition for Bright Neighborhoods between September 2024 and April 2025. The total cost of outreach and marketing labor and expenses during this time is shown in the tables below.

Total Overall Costs to Implement	
Expense Item	Cost
Total Outreach Costs	\$253,382.09
Total Marketing Costs	\$210,628.07
Total Overall Costs to Implement	\$464,010.16

Labor Expenses	
Expense Item	Cost
Outreach Labor	\$250,710
Marketing Labor	\$154,553.50
Total Labor Costs	\$405,263.50

Outreach Expenses	
Expense Item	Cost
Outreach Events	\$2,672.09
Total Outreach Expenses	\$2,672.09

Marketing Expenses	
Expense Item	Cost
Digital Advertisements: Total Ad Buy	\$54,541.37
<i>Overall Cost Per Click</i>	\$0.70
<i>Meta Cost Per Click</i>	\$0.78

Google Display Cost Per Click	\$8.22
YouTube Cost Per Click	\$0.33
USPS Every Door Direct Mailer & Postage	\$1,533.20
Total Marketing Expenses	\$56,074.57

Totaling all of these items together, the total cost to implement Bright Neighborhoods between September 2024 and April 2025 was \$464,010.16.

With 169 intake forms received, the cost per intake was \$2,746. With sixteen referrals to Approved Vendors, the cost per referral was \$29,000.64, and with eight Bright Neighborhoods participants receiving projects, the cost per project was \$58,001.

The ILSFA Grassroots Educators receive funding from the program to work in their communities to support the program. The educator supporting Bright Neighborhoods in the Chicago community area was able to support 16 direct referrals for intake. The approximate cost for these efforts was \$10,087.51, which gives a cost per intake of \$630.47.

Findings and Analysis

The Bright Neighborhoods initiative in the 2024-25 program year set out to gather a substantial dataset to assess the success of tactics deployed within the initiative. This data set would be used to evaluate three goals:

100-200 Intake Forms per Community	
	Total
Chicago Neighborhoods	45
Waukegan	5
Carbondale-Marion Micropolitan Area	15
30-50 Referrals to Approved Vendors per Community	
	Total
Chicago Neighborhoods	3
Waukegan	2
Carbondale-Marion Micropolitan Area	9
20-25 Installations per Community	
	Total
Chicago Neighborhoods	0
Waukegan	0
Carbondale-Marion Micropolitan Area	4

This Bright Neighborhoods program year did not reach the community goals for intake forms, referrals, or installations. Despite this, the initiative brought many learnings about best practices for leading interested participants to enroll and uncovered the depth of barriers preventing these participants from reaching the end goal of a solar installation.

Successes

MARKETING AND DIGITAL ADVERTISING

Marketing and digital advertisements with consistent and engaging messages build awareness, create more qualified leads, and convert leads into intake forms, resulting in more participants entering the program.

Marketing and digital advertising played a pivotal role in delivering consistent, engaging messaging that raised awareness, generated qualified leads, and effectively converted those leads into intake form submissions.

Early marketing efforts centered on providing materials to support the outreach team, presentation materials for educational events, organic social media, and email marketing. The deployment of digital advertising in March 2025 marked a turning point. These tactics drove a notable spike in intake forms, with 56% (94 of the total 169) of total submissions attributed directly to advertisements (Figure 6). The dramatic increase in intake forms in March and April from digital advertisements illustrates how marketing can generate more interest and brand recognition with strong messages and strategic ad placement in a short amount of time. The results of the digital ad campaign during both years of the Bright Neighborhoods initiative prove that advertising is a strong catalyst for increased audience engagement and submitted intake forms.

PARTICIPANT SUPPORT

Continuous support by program representatives helped participants complete the process from start to finish.

As shown in Figure 6, a referral by a Grassroots Educator was ranked fifth for “how heard” by participants. Because the ILSFA Grassroots Educators work to support the program by directly engaging with their community over several years, they create trusting relationships with community residents, allowing them to refer those interested in solar energy to the ILSFA program. This involved inviting these residents to events held alongside the Program Administrator to educate the participants more on how the program works, ending in an intake form and further marketing follow-ups. This warm hand-off by the Grassroots Educator is beneficial as it begins to build trust between the participants and the ILSFA representative.

The Program Administrator also supported income-eligible prospective participants in the Bright Neighborhoods communities who either found the program through the first year of the initiative or who found ILSFA on their own over the last three years but were still without a solar installation. Several income-eligible participants in Bright Neighborhoods 2023-2024 were unable to move forward with an installation due to shading or home repair concerns (Bright Neighborhoods 2023-2024 Report, 35). The Program Administrator maintained relationships with nine of these participants who were still interested in an installation through periodic phone calls (Figure 15). Of these nine participants, seven were referred to the Approved Vendor for their community area in Bright Neighborhoods 2024-2025, and five are receiving an installation.

The Program Administrator also identified thirteen participants in Bright Neighborhoods areas who were previously deemed eligible but had not yet worked with a vendor. The Program Administrator contacted this list by email and phone to verify whether the homeowner was still interested, and if so, if they would like a direct referral. Of the thirteen, one participant already had an installation outside of ILSFA, one was interested, and one was referred to the Approved Vendor. Although there was only a response from three of the thirteen, this coordination demonstrates that by creating a relationship with these participants to support them in connecting with an Approved Vendor, the Program Administrator was able to preserve credibility and trust in the program.

Finally, the program coordination shown in Figure 16 represents both cold calls to a list of Chicago residents who participated in a building retrofit program previously and were looking for additional energy resources, and warm hand-offs from an electrification program. The cold calls to building retrofit participants were ineffective in producing intake forms, but the warm hand-offs were more successful, demonstrating the importance of human connections between trusted programs to encourage participation.

APPROVED VENDORS

Working with one designated Approved Vendor created an easier participant journey.

In the Residential Solar (Small) sub-program, finding an Approved Vendor can be a difficult process. The Grassroots Educator in the Chicago community area expressed that it is much easier to work with one designated Approved Vendor to create a smoother referral process. Participants working with this Grassroots Educator have experienced difficulties connecting with an Approved Vendor when calling the list of registered vendors participating in the small residential sub-program. The direct referral in Bright Neighborhoods to an Approved Vendor they knew would participate provided a simpler process for the participant by removing the burden of researching different vendors that may be interested in their project.

Barriers

INCOME VERIFICATION

A low number of income verifications in both years of Bright Neighborhoods shows that the largest barriers occur after intake.

The biggest learning and similarity between the first and second years of Bright Neighborhoods is the drop-off between intake and income verification. As shown in Figure 9, of the 65 total eligible residential solar participants, 24 participants submitted an income verification form (37% of the total eligible participants). Similarly, in Bright Neighborhoods 2023-2024, only 38% of prospective participants submitted an income verification form (Bright Neighborhoods 2023-2024 Report, 33). This shows that the process and need for income verification are a barrier to further participation.

The 2023-2024 initiative saw more drop-offs during the verification process than the second year, largely due to incomplete form submissions requiring further documentation. Despite the higher percentage of submitted income verification forms moving forward in this second year, incomplete form submissions remain an issue preventing participants from verifying their eligibility. Many of the participants who completed their eligibility for this initiative year were able to submit an income affidavit based on residency in a HUD QCT or were guided by a program representative, using that relationship to ensure a form was submitted properly.

LACK OF AWARENESS AND DISTRUST REMAIN DEEP BARRIERS TO THE INTAKE AND APPLICATION PROCESS.

During outreach events in each of the selected Bright Neighborhoods communities, prospective participants often ask whether the program is a scam or exclaim it's "too good to be true". The Program Administrator and the IPA are aware of distrust in solar energy that has been created through predatory practices used by some marketers in income-eligible areas. This is one of the biggest barriers Bright Neighborhoods set out to address, but it still finds that distrust is deeply rooted in these communities.

In a follow-up phone call with one prospective participant, they mentioned being wary of sharing their personal information after receiving the program's marketing emails requesting that they verify their income. Once the participant spoke with a program representative, they felt reassured that the emails were not a scam and decided to submit an income verification form. This barrier of distrust in marketers and solar energy runs deep, will take time to overcome, and will require consistent messaging and education.

Recommendations: Applying Learnings

Proposed Residential Solar (Small) Sub-Program Design Updates

1. Update the income verification process and form to ensure participants can stay engaged until verified as eligible.

As discussed in the Findings and Analysis section, the income verification process has proven to be a barrier to participation in both years of the initiative. The income verification form is lengthy, and it is easy to miss important steps, like submitting proper documentation, and participants are wary of sharing personal information. Because of these challenges, the Program Administrator intends to review the income verification process to identify pain points, simplify the form for the main program, and add a geographic eligibility method to support participants through eligibility better.

To support the review of the income verification process, the Program Administrator will gather anecdotal evidence from program participants who have shown their interest in the program but have not moved forward with income verification. These insights will help shape the improvements to the verification form and how the program discusses income verification with participants.

The Program Administrator also plans to explore educational materials and simplify the income verification form. The income verification process is arduous and requires specific documentation and household information to complete a review. However, a prospective participant is likely unaware of these requirements until they are in the middle of submitting the form. We can better prepare these participants by providing educational materials highlighting what verified methods are available and what, if any, supporting documents should be uploaded. Although it is important to educate these participants, this review should focus on creating a form that is simpler to understand and fill out, leading the participant to complete what is necessary to avoid missing information. Preparing the participant, combined with a simplified form, is an important step to addressing this barrier to reaching completed installations.

Additionally, the Agency's [Request for Stakeholder feedback](#) for the 2026 Long-Term Plan considers the inclusion of self-attestation for Residential Solar (Small) participants based on HUD Qualified Census Tracts (QCT) geographic eligibility. As noted in Figure 8, 5 of the 17 income-eligible participants verified their income using the self-attestation based on residency in a HUD QCT. This process is easier for the participant because it does not require any uploads. It is also simpler for the Program Administrator to validate, only requiring a verification of the residence address and that the listed income meets eligibility requirements. Considering the Bright Neighborhoods income

verification data, the Program Administrator supports including this new method for Residential Solar (Small) participants.

Finally, the Program Administrator will continue seeking coordination with other income-qualifying programs to receive direct referrals of eligible participants that would not require re-verifying their income. This will simplify the process to confirm eligibility and reduce the burden of proof on the participant to recertify their income eligibility.

2. Review the Approved Vendor referral process to support connections made between prospective participants searching for a vendor

As mentioned by the Grassroots Educators involved in Bright Neighborhoods, using a designated Approved Vendor for each community area was helpful to move participants through the customer journey. Though the program may not be able to provide direct referrals to specific Approved Vendors, the Program Administrator intends to review the referral process outlined in the [Approved Vendor Manual](#) to identify areas to streamline the process to connect participants with vendors actively completing projects.

Any solar company interested in working on ILSFA is required to become registered as an Approved Vendor to address concerns of illegitimate companies. However, as mentioned above, this list of registered companies does not always lead to a project when the participant reaches out. The Program Administrator plans to review how the referral process is implemented to ensure eligible participants are effectively connected with active vendors to increase program participation.

Proposed Outreach and Promotional Changes

1. Develop a community engagement plan for the ILSFA program to improve support to prospective participants and Grassroots Education referrals.

Direct support by a program representative from start to finish and collaboration with a Grassroots Educator established trust with prospective participants, leading to more continuous interest in the program. The Program Administrator will develop a community engagement plan providing increased support to prospective participants through the process from start to finish and collaborating with Grassroots Educators for direct referrals.

This engagement plan should continue to build on the trust established through local partnerships and support participants further than just the initial intake. The Program Administrator intends to create additional touchpoints with participants after intake and explore pathways for direct referrals by Grassroots Educators. The successes above show that warm hand-offs and consistent support of a participant throughout their journey are beneficial to generating interest and maintaining trust in the program, addressing one of the largest barriers to residential solar participation.

- 2. Increase the Program Administrator’s role in promoting the Illinois Solar for All program directly to participants, raising awareness, building trust, and bolstering the ongoing efforts of Approved Vendors and Grassroots Educators.**

A consolidated marketing strategy, tactics, and consistent messaging motivated residents to connect and submit an intake form during Bright Neighborhoods. The Program Administrator proposes increasing their role by marketing the ILSFA program directly to residents. By generating additional awareness of ILSFA, the Program Administrator can bolster the marketing efforts of Approved Vendors and Grassroots Educators.

Appendix

[2023-2024 Bright Neighborhoods Report](#)

[Bright Neighborhoods 2024-2025 Request for Feedback](#)

[Bright Neighborhoods 2024-2025 Response to Comments](#)

[Bright Neighborhoods 2024-2025 Updated Design](#)