

Qualified Critical Service Providers

2026-2027 PROGRAM YEAR

A qualified Critical Service Provider is a non-profit or public entity that offers critical services to an Income-Eligible Community or Environmental Justice Community. An approved Critical Service Provider is a project requirement for the Illinois Solar for All: Non-Profit and Public Facilities sub-program or may be submitted as an anchor tenant for the Illinois Solar for All: Community Solar sub-program.

All Critical Service Providers must be approved by the Program Administrator no later than the time of Part 1 application. The request should be in the form of a letter to the Program Administrator, who will review such requests on a case-by-case basis.

Please note that only non-profits and public entities demonstrating a high degree of critical services provision to Income-Eligible Communities or Environmental Justice Communities will be designated as Critical Service Providers. The list of Critical Service Providers contained in the Approved Vendor Manual was developed through a process that included stakeholder feedback and is intended to be a comprehensive list of appropriate organizational types. The Program Administrator must approve the request before an Approved Vendor submits a project application for that entity, or the application will be deemed ineligible for consideration. A qualified Critical Service Provider is a non-profit or public entity that offers critical services to Income-Eligible Communities or Environmental Justice Communities, including:

- Advocacy organizations
- Affordable housing providers
- After-school providers
- Childcare centers
- Community centers
- Community financial institutions (such as credit unions and non-profit lenders)
- Disability service providers
- Domestic Violence Centers
- Fire stations and emergency medical services
- Family support agencies
- Food pantries
- Homeless shelters
- Hospitals, healthcare facilities, and clinics
- Housing support service providers



- Immigration service providers
- Job training and workforce development services
- Law/legal centers (non-profit providing pro-bono services to income-eligible or environmental justice communities)
- Libraries
- Affordable Housing Provider (for the purposes of ILSFA Community Solar scoring prioritization only)
- Mental and behavioral health facilities
- Places of worship
- Rehabilitation providers
- Senior centers
- Social service agencies (including unemployment and social security offices)
- Transitional or supportive housing (including for teens and LGBTQ+)
- Women's or children's shelters

Documentation of the Critical Service Provider's status must be submitted by no later than the time of the Part I application.

The Program Administrator can review other types of potential CSPs not found on this list on a case-by-case basis. Those considering submitting as an "other" CSP are advised to submit their requests as early as possible to the Program Administrator; these requests will be reviewed carefully and may not be granted. Requirements for CSP requests are outlined below. Note that beginning with Program Year 2023-2024, carceral institutions, namely police stations, jails, prisons, and immigration detention centers, will no longer be considered as pre-qualified critical service providers based on comments received in both the June 2023 and October 2022 request for comment periods. Requests from individual institutions for consideration as a critical service provider may be submitted and will be evaluated in the context of the comments received about this topic.

Requirements for Critical Service Provider Requests

Letters requesting Critical Service Provider status for non-profits and public entities must include the following:

1. A description of the services provided by the non-profit or public entity that it asserts should be considered critical services, and a description of the program(s) through which the non-profit or public entity offers those services. This should include the following, as applicable:
 - The nature of the critical services provided
 - The population served by the critical services (e.g., demographics, location, size)
 - The manner in which recipients access the critical services (i.e., application process, qualifications, enrollment period)
 - Who delivers the services (e.g., social worker, clinician, tradesperson, educator)
 - Whether the critical services are accessed onsite and, if not, where are the services provided/accessed (e.g., mobile services using trucks)
 - Critical services program (goals, origin/date program started, partner agencies/entities and roles, outlook)



- Portion of the entity’s work, that is, the provision of critical services. Please provide a description, if applicable, of the non-critical services provided by the entity.
 - Description of any costs to access services, and if there are differences in the cost of services for income-eligible recipients
2. An explanation of how the proposed PV system will bolster the impact and delivery of critical services to low-income residents of IECs or EJs. Explanations will not be considered passing if the PV system only impacts all residents generally, there must be a specific impact to low-income residents of IECs or EJs. For example, deferment of raising utility costs for all residents in an IEC or EJ does not constitute critical services to low-income residents. Supporting documentation such as relevant metrics demonstrating the impact of the critical services, as applicable.

Critical Service Provider requests will be scored utilizing the following rubric. The rubric is PASS/FAIL, thus all items in the rubric must be met for an entity to be considered a Critical Service Provider.

Criteria	Pass/Fail	Expected Indicators of A Passing Response
Description of the services provided by the entity is asserted as critical.		A passing response clearly identifies and describes specific services provided by the entity. Sufficient detail about each critical service is provided, and it must include specific examples or evidence supporting the assertion that these services are critical to income-eligible households.
Details of population(s) served by critical services (e.g., demographics, location, size)		Beyond generalizations, a passing response shows specifics about the demographics, location, and size of low-income populations receiving the critical services. Supporting data must be within the past 2 years, relevant, and directly linked to the population details provided in the description.
Description of how recipients access the critical services (i.e., enrollment period, application process, qualifications, organizational partnerships)		A passing response includes examples of open enrollment periods, deadlines, or recurring application cycles that explain how the services are accessed. If recipients are referred from external entities, the nature of these partnerships and their impact on service accessibility must be discussed.
Description of who in the entity delivers the critical services		A passing response names the specific roles or professions within the entity that deliver the critical services (e.g., social workers, clinicians, tradespeople, educators, or any other relevant roles). Information is included about the qualifications, expertise, and training that impact the effectiveness of the critical services for income-eligible populations.

Historical details and goals of any programs for delivering critical services		A passing response details the goals, origin (e.g., date program started), and any partnerships with other entities that participate in delivering the critical services to income-eligible populations.
Description of whether the critical services are accessed onsite, and if not, where the services are provided (e.g., mobile services, online)		A passing response clearly identifies and names specific services that are accessed onsite. If services are not accessed onsite, the response must clearly state where these services are provided.
What portion of the entity's work is critical services? If applicable, describe any other non-critical services.		A passing response demonstrates that at least 50% of the entity's work is critical services, specifically to income-eligible residents. Any supporting detail confirming this will be considered. The response must provide a description, if applicable, of the non-critical services provided by the entity.
Description of the cost to access critical services. Include assistance or considerations available for income-eligible recipients to access the critical services.		A passing response details normal costs for services and demonstrates that there are options to reduce or eliminate costs for individuals with financial need. Examples may include a sliding scale or income-based pricing models. It may also discuss outreach channels, community partnerships, or other means to ensure that eligible individuals are aware of and able to access available services.
Explanation of how the proposed photovoltaic (PV) system will enhance the entity's impact and delivery of the critical services to income-eligible residents of Income-Eligible Communities (IECs) or Environmental Justice Communities (EJCs).		A passing response shows that the proposed photovoltaic (PV) system clearly benefits the entity's impact and delivery of critical services to income-eligible residents of IECs or EJCs. Responses may include the financial, environmental, and community impact of the PV system. The cost savings may be redirected towards providing more critical services to low-income populations or ensuring that the services can be delivered with greater reliability.
Demonstration of the impact of critical services on low-income populations.		A passing response demonstrates that services have positively affected the lives or circumstances of low-income individuals. The entity's impact on low-income populations is demonstrated through a combination of quantitative and qualitative data, testimonials, and feedback mechanisms. It also avoids generalizations and provides a precise understanding of the targeted demographic's needs.

In order to determine if the entity qualifies as a Critical Service Provider, the Program Administrator will review the information provided in the request letter and accompanying materials, utilizing a scoring rubric. The Program Administrator's determination will be based on whether the prospective entity provides services that improve living conditions, financial status, environmental and health status, and other social welfare indicators. The review will consider the services offered, their alignment with and ability to meet identified needs, how accessible they are, and the organization's role and impact in delivering the critical services. In general, critical services should represent a majority of the activities performed by the organization.

Where there are gaps in the information provided or questions about the request, the Program Administrator will send a written request for clarification.

The letter should be submitted on the letterhead of the non-profit or public entity and signed by an officer of the organization. It may be submitted directly by the entity or by an Approved Vendor with which the entity is working. Please submit the letter to the Program Administrator at least 30 calendar days in advance of a sub-program project submission window opening to allow for adequate review time. Once a letter is received, the Program Administrator will either approve the application or will communicate any deficiencies to the requesting entity within 10 business days, although a failure to complete the notification of deficiencies within 10 business days shall not be deemed an approval. If the Critical Service Provider request is denied, an appeal of that determination may be made to the Illinois Power Agency following the process in Section 1.4 of the Approved Vendor Manual.