

ILSFA Advisory Committee Fall 2026

Quarterly Meeting Transcription

September 29, 2026, 7:02PM

1h 28m 4s

● **Jennifer Brown** started transcription



Jennifer Brown 0:05

Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Jennifer Brown. I am delighted, as always, to provide this space along with Elevate, our program administrator and Illinois Power Agency, and all of the team members that are here from the IPA.

Today is September 29th, 2026 for our quarterly ILSFA Advisory Committee meeting for Illinois Solar for All. Let's go ahead and dig right in. For our agenda today we're going to give you a couple quick updates from last quarterly meeting. And we have two special guests to share with us about battery storage for all. We have a guest from Illinois Power Agency to share with us about that. We have some representatives from ESource that will discuss the program evaluation for the Illinois Solar for All program. But prior to that, we will have Jennifer Schmidt from Illinois Power Agency to share a little bit about the program administrator transition that is currently taking place. So let's go ahead and dig right into our deck.

We will have opportunities for you to ask questions in between presentations. So we'll stop in between each presentation and give you an opportunity to share any questions that you have.

COMMITTEE MEETING UPDATES

It seems like it was just yesterday, but June 23rd was our last meeting. I can't believe that the summer went by and we're already cold outside and fall is fully set in. On June 23rd, we last met and we had 14 members of our 18 members present. You guys have really been showing up this year. So, thank you so much for your amazing attendance and amazing engagement in all of our meetings. So we have 14 members present.

We got a chance to give you some updates on CRGA and the long-term plan and how that has been affecting the program and the different changes that have taken place. And then the second topic for that meeting was project selection and the changes that were, that are, taking place with project selection and how it's affecting the small residential subprogram of Illinois Solar for All. So if you were not present at that meeting or you didn't get a chance to review the recording, it is available on the Illinois Solar for All Advisory Committee website. And we're happy to provide that again.

Looks like we still have some folks joining. All right, so I'm going to pass the mic on over to Jennifer Schmidt from Illinois Power Agency for our next slide. And she will go ahead and share.

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR TRANSITION UPDATE



Schmidt, Jennifer M. 3:41

I'm Jen Schmidt, senior program manager for the Illinois Solar for All program, and just providing an update to everyone. It's not really a new update as far as the program goes, but because we haven't met since June, it is an update since our last meeting. We are transitioning to a joint program administrator that will be managing both programs, Illinois Shines and Illinois Solar for All. We made the selection through a competitive bid consultant retention process. There was an RFP selection team that selected eligible proposers. Following the RFP process, Energy Solutions was selected as the new Program Administrator. We have been working with Energy Solutions, who currently runs Illinois Shines. We've been working with them for a couple of months now to begin the transition. We've been doing knowledge transfer and working on developing plans for transitioning individual areas. As far as how it affects the committee, you all will continue to work with the current contacts, Jennifer, and the other contacts, Elevate, until we notify you that there's a different contact. One thing that I've made clear to both sides is that, you know, this is a really important, these are really important relationships that we value for the program, and we want to make sure that there is a warm handoff of those. So I expect that in the coming weeks and months that you will all be hearing directly from us as far as what the transition looks like. And if there are any questions, I can take them. But this is work that's mostly happening behind the scenes. And Elevators still administering Illinois Solar for All on a day-to-day basis. We're actually having a wonderful year as far as program submissions. And yeah, that's really all I had for this.



Jennifer Brown 6:11

Okay, wonderful. Are there any questions for Jen regarding the transition that you guys want to submit at this point?



Schmidt, Jennifer M. 6:29

Thanks.



Jennifer Brown 6:33

Okay, wonderful. If there are any questions that come up after the meeting, feel free

to submit those questions to me and we will make sure to get them answered and submit back to the entire committee.

All right. So our next guest for topic one is Audrey Steinbach from Illinois Power Agency. Audrey is the Energy Storage Director at Illinois Power Agency. So, Audrey, I'll go ahead and pass the mic on over to you.

STORAGE FOR ALL

SA

Steinbach, Audrey 7:14

Thank you so much. Hi, everyone. It's true. My name is Audrey Steinbach, and I am the Energy Storage Director for the IPA. So today, we're going to talk a little bit about the Storage for All program, which is a program that is outlined in the Clean and Reliable Grid Affordability Act, or CRGA for short. Next slide, please.

Okay, so what is Storage for All? So CRGA outlines a few different requirements for the Storage for All program. It is to be developed by the IPA. It's to be a behind the meter energy storage incentive program for income eligible participants that are current or future participants in the Illinois Solar for All program. So with that kind of call from the legislation there, it is meant to be a companion program with the Illinois Solar for All program.

It is meant to be available to current and future participants of all sub programs aside from the community solar sub program from Illinois Solar for All. So that would be a small, small residential, large residential and nonprofit, and public facility. There must be 0 upfront costs for participants in the Storage for All program, and the program needs to be designed in coordination with the job training programs that already exist coming from FEJA and CEJA. And lastly here, as far as program scope and budget, the legislation does note that the ceiling for the budget is 25% of the budget that is currently allocated to those three sub-programs in Illinois Solar for All. So again, that 25% is a ceiling. That's not a requirement. So we can only go up to that amount if and when we do roll this program out. I can pause there for any quick questions.

Okay, nothing. Great. Next slide is the timeline. Yes. Sorry, the fonts here got a little wacky, but everything's still legible. So that's good. This is kind of the timeline of the process for developing this program. So actually the little marker of where we're at now should be on #2 at this point. So apologies for that as well.

But across basically now until next summer, we're going to be working on developing what this program could look like, reaching out to stakeholders such as yourselves to get feedback. So I spent the last month of September really doing things like this, reaching out to various stakeholder groups, and building an e-mail digest list full of

interested entities, stakeholders, community members that are looking to get involved in the development and design of this program. So that was taking place across September.

And then this week, possibly as soon as tomorrow, the IPA is going to be releasing a written stakeholder feedback question set. So that's going to outline those quick bullets that I went through on the previous slide about the legislative requirements for this program, some background resources for stakeholders to review, and then a set of questions that folks can respond to and provide written feedback to the IPA in terms of how this program could look and what we can start thinking about in terms of program design. So that's this week. Already, it's late September, which is shocking. And then the next step in the process is we're going to be holding a virtual workshop at the end of October. Details for that workshop will be in the stakeholder feedback request that goes out this week, including a registration link for that workshop. And in that workshop, we'll go through the topics that we outlined in the written feedback request, as well as other topics if we have time. So, this kind of 1-2 punch, if you will, of the written feedback and then the virtual workshop, these are the first steps in the feedback process to really kind of tap into the community, the market, where people are at in terms of what we want this program to look like, and really getting good feedback on kind of a first step in creating a skeleton for this program. So, we'll get that feedback through written and verbal feedback, with written requests and the workshop where people can chat through that forum. And then looking at items four and five here across this winter going into next year as well. The IPA will assess feedback that we received this fall, see if we want to do another more refined set of stakeholder feedback questions, possibly another workshop. So that wintertime period is a little bit TBD on what exactly things will look like, but I know there will be more opportunities for feedback. We're not exactly sure about the timing or forum just yet though. And then this is all building to that item number 5 where on June 1st, the agency does need to put out a draft of the first version of an energy storage resources procurement plan. And that is going to be kind of a similar document to the agency's long-term renewable resources procurement plan which holds a lot of the information for the Illinois Solar for All program design. It's a similar idea, but it's a plan just focused on storage resources. So, this energy storage, or rather this storage for all programs and its initial design, will be housed in that draft plan to be released next summer. So that's kind of what

we're working towards now is getting feedback, hearing from people, and then bringing that feedback back into the IPA, designing different approaches of what the program could look like, putting those back into the world, getting feedback again and then putting that draft plan out next summer.

Pausing there for questions again before we go to my last slide.

SM

Schmidt, Jennifer M. 14:44

We do have a question in the chat. Angenetta, do you want to come off mute to ask the question?

AF

Angenetta Frison 14:52

Sure. So, I guess my question is, is that one, kudos for kind of thinking about this. So my question is, is that what problem are we trying to solve by introducing storage for all? That's my first question. And then my second question is around ongoing costs. Do you have any idea? I know initially there's no upfront costs to participants, but are there any ongoing costs that participants may experience or incur. So those are my two questions.

SA

Steinbach, Audrey 15:28

Yeah, thank you. Great question. So in terms of the problem that Storage for All is intended to solve, the legislative language doesn't contemplate a problem necessarily that the program is looking to solve. And it also does not talk about a primary program focus either. So while this can be a little bit vague in terms of instruction, it's actually good in terms of program design, because that means we can design the program to solve what problems we see as most persistent or most useful to solve. And it doesn't have to solve one problem. It can solve many problems. So that's really kind of what the stakeholder feedback is looking to kind of shake out, right? What do we find to be the most persistent problems for income eligible homes, businesses, nonprofits, and public facilities? Like what are the problems that this group needs solved that a behind the meter storage system can help solve? So there isn't a requirement or a focus outline that we have to tack to. We can design it the way that we see fit, basically in terms of the benefits that it'll bring to those that install these systems. So that's good. We have some wiggle room there and there is a specific question in the question set coming out this week asking, what should the program focus be? Should there be a program focus? Or should we just work to get

as many of these projects installed as possible? Should we focus on resilience? Should we focus on bill savings, all of it, right? That would be ideal. But if we have to pick and choose, then hearing from stakeholders on what's most important is really helpful.

Getting to your second question, any ongoing costs that participants may experience or incur? So just to clarify, the legislation only speaks about no upfront costs, so 0 upfront costs to participants. And then additionally, it doesn't have the same requirement for this program of the 50% guaranteed savings that you see in Illinois Solar for All. But because this program is a companion program with the Illinois Solar for All program, we do need to keep that 50 percent guaranteed savings item intact, obviously. So this kind of gets into data, numbers, things like that and understanding, you know, if we add a battery onto these already existing systems, what does that look like on a customer's bill? What does that look like for their energy usage? So, there's a lot of really big questions here that we need to tackle throughout the next like 6 to 8 months through these stakeholder feedback processes. So, this is kind of me with my hat in my hand saying anything and everything that you guys have to throw at us in terms of feedback will be helpful in thinking through this. You know, we put together a set of questions that we're going to get out of this week. Like I mentioned, and there's a few topics in there. We held a couple of topics for a second question set later, because we didn't want to throw too much at everyone right off the bat. But yes, these are really important questions that we need to wrestle with, think through. Any data that folks can provide, yeah, all of that, we are very happy to hear, receive through the workshop or through the written feedback request.



Jennifer Brown 19:43

Audrey, it looks like we have another question slash comment in the chat. Kai, not sure if you're able to come off mute and share your comment or else I can read it.



Kai Luckert (ARF) 20:00

Yeah, I was mostly just responding to the question that was posed, just kind of like the importance of batteries in the market today, specifically highlighting Ameren and ComEd net metering policies are not anywhere close to what they used to be. Where you know, you would essentially get credited for every kilowatt hour at 100% value. Now you're only credited for the supply portion or the supply value of that

energy. So, batteries really have two big benefits to homeowners, one being more savings. You're able to shave off a lot of those delivery charges if you have a battery, and also resiliency. A lot of our customers at ARF that we've worked with are serviced by cooperatives where outages are not uncommon. And so they very frequently ask us about batteries and is there going to be a state program coming out that's going to help us get batteries because they're dealing with several power outages every month. So, if the system is set up in a specific way where you have an automatic transfer switch, then you can have continued power if your battery is charged up, even if the grid is down. So just wanted to highlight a couple of benefits of implementing storage on these projects.

SA

Steinbach, Audrey 21:22

Yeah, thank you. That's exactly right. So, there are tons of benefits, but of course, there's a lot going on with these customers' bills in terms of net metering credits, the new low-income discount rate, things of this nature. So we have a lot of things that we need to consider in terms of financing, bringing costs down to where we want to see them, but also providing those benefits of resiliency, making sure that we are not taking too big of a bite out of the Illinois Solar for All program budget. So there are quite a few things to keep in balance here. And that's really why I'm coming to you all, the experts that have been thinking about a lot of these things for a long time, to put your thinking caps on and help us get to that right size fit for this program on all of these different items.

Okay, I have one more slide and it's basically just how to get involved. So like I've kind of been saying over and over, sorry, I probably sound like a broken record. We really want to hear from you guys. We want you guys involved in this process as much as you are able to be involved. I don't want to ask too much of people, but your insight is super, super valuable to us. And we really want to avoid pitfalls, right? If you could design a program from scratch, knowing what you know about Solar for All, working with that program for a long time, what would you avoid? What would you do differently? These types of things are really helpful.

So sign up for the link right here with the star. That is how you get all the updates for the Storage for All program. Everything, all the updates that I'm going to be sending out for this program development will be through that e-mail list. So if you're not on

that e-mail list, you're going to miss something.

I would definitely sign up for that e-mail list today if you can, because we're going to be pushing out that question set this week, like I mentioned. So the sooner the better. The questions that will be posted on the IPA website as well. So it's not like if you don't get that e-mail, you're totally going to miss it. But the sooner the better on signing up for that e-mail list.

And yes, thank you, Jennifer. Just going to put the link in the chat for everyone. And then just pointing out a few resources that might be newer to folks. The energy storage webpage, that is a newer webpage on the IPA website as of this year. That has information on all of the IPA's energy storage work. So both the development of this behind the meter program as well as our utility scale procurements. Now that latter topic obviously doesn't touch on what this group works on, but if you want to stay up to date on that work, that's there too. The IPA stakeholder engagement webpage, that's a one-stop shop for anything that IPA is doing related to stakeholder engagement, which will also have the storage for all engagement events, information requests posted on that page as well. So we will be cross posting things on the energy storage webpage and that stakeholder engagement webpage to make sure that no one misses anything.

Lastly, here I have a general storage e-mail address that if you have any questions, stray thoughts, things you want to send me over e-mail, that's a great place to send them. So, that's everything. I'll pause and see if we have any questions again about the arc of things, but we're really just picking up steam now on all of this and really excited and happy to have anyone on board that has the time and energy to help us.



Jennifer Brown 25:39

All right, any additional questions for Audrey?

Okay, wonderful. Thank you so much for joining us, Audrey. We really appreciate it. And we're excited about battery storage for all coming to our communities. While we are introducing our next guest,



Steinbach, Audrey 25:47

Thank you.



Jennifer Brown 26:05

We will also drop those links in the comments for you so that you guys can make sure to take advantage of being a part of the distribution list that Audrey will use for future communications.

All right. So now I am going to stop sharing for a quick moment as I introduce our next speaker, Mallika from eSource. Mallika, you can go ahead and come off of mute. I need to switch screens real quick just so that I can get your presentation up. But you can introduce yourself and any team members that you have here, too, Mallika.



Mallika Jayaraman 26:58

That sounds good. And do you actually want me to share my screen, Jennifer, with the presentation?



Jennifer Brown 27:04

Oh, that's right. You do have access. Yes, please do.

2025-2026 PROGRAM YEAR EVALUATION PLAN

MJ **Mallika Jayaraman** 27:08

Okay, will do. So hi, everyone. I think I've met some of you before, but my name is Mallika Jayaraman. I am a senior managing consultant at eSource. You all may previously have known us as Illume. We have a different name now, but are still largely the same team of folks who've been working on this evaluation for, I think it's the past four program years now. I will go ahead and let some other folks who I have on the phone introduce themselves. We have another person from eSource and then a couple of folks from our partners at Verdant and ICC as well who will be speaking today. So I'll maybe hand it off to Miriam just to say a quick hello.

MS **Miriam Stein** 27:58

Hello, I'm Miriam Stein. I work with Mallika on eSource and have been supporting the Illinois Solar for All evaluation, especially focusing on doing research with Grassroots Educators, and look forward to hearing your feedback today.

MJ **Mallika Jayaraman** 28:19

And then Lauren, can you Lauren who will also be speaking today?

LR **Lauren Robinson** 28:24

Yes, hi, I'm Lauren Robinson from Vernon Associates. We support the evaluation, doing the impact work, looking at bill impacts and greenhouse gas impacts. As well, we did research on a special topic related to energy sovereignty, which you'll be hearing about from me later.

MJ **Mallika Jayaraman** 28:48

And then I may just have Cindy, even though you're not speaking, just say a quick hello since you're also part of the team and listening in today, if that's okay to put you on the spot.

CM **Cynthia Manson** 29:00

Sure, hi, my name is Cindy Manson and I work for Industrial Economics and we're doing the economic impacts measurement piece of the evaluation.

MJ **Mallika Jayaraman** 29:10

Great, great. So thanks everyone for introducing yourselves. And I'll get started on our presentation. So just to give a quick overview of some of the things I'm hoping to talk about today, I did want to just give a quick refresher on who we are as the third party evaluator and what our role is related to this program.

I'm then going to share out some of our results from our evaluation of the 2024 to 2025 program year. This is the program year that we just completed an evaluation for and published a report back in June with results on this evaluation. Lauren is going to provide an update on the energy sovereignty report that we just did, focused specifically on the energy sovereignty portion of the program. And then I did want to save some time at the end for this group to provide any input that you all may have on our upcoming evaluation year. And if there are any specific topics we should be focusing on as we look into the program year that ran from 2025 to 2026. So that's the one that just ended back in May. And then we also have some additional special topics that we are looking into as well.

And folks are welcome to drop questions in the chat throughout. I'll try and keep an eye on it and monitor it. But also, hopefully, Miriam, you can help me out if I miss something. And we'll have time for questions at the end of each of the sections as well.

So starting with just an overview of who we are as the evaluator and what we do related to the program. So as the third party evaluator for Illinois Solar for All, our job is really to provide kind of an independent perspective on whether the program is accomplishing its goals and whether program resources are being used optimally. So one of the main ways we do that is through annual reports on the program that we produce each year. As part of those reports, we typically look at the impacts that new solar added through the program, are producing on the electric grid. So what's the new solar capacity look like? You know, how much electricity is being generated. We look at the impacts of participating in the program on customer bills, how much money your customer is saving. We look at the greenhouse gas reductions associated with the program. We look at the impact of the program on the GDP of Illinois, as well as new jobs created.

We look at where projects are located throughout the state, as well as the amount of funding that goes to groups like environmental justice communities. And then a big part of what we do is we collect perspectives from program participants, as well as

other actors working with the program to assess how the program is running, as well as the performance of the program administrator.

So this is kind of our annual evaluation focus. In addition to this, we do some deep dive reports on specific topics to try and dig a little more into certain things that we're not able to cover through our annual evaluation. And we refer to these reports as special topic reports.

And as mentioned earlier, we'll be sharing the results from one of those with you today, as well as discussing some of our upcoming special topic reports as well. This slide just shows some of the key kind of organizations and people who work with the Illinois Solar for All program. I imagine you all are probably pretty familiar with the actors who kind of make Illinois Solar for All happen as well as benefit from the program. So I won't spend too much time on this.

One thing that I want to note is just that as part of our 2024 to 2025 evaluation, we were able to speak to all of these different groups, you know, either through direct conversations or through surveys, with the exception of job trainers, who we will be collecting input from as part of the upcoming program evaluation. And then we do collect input from anyone, whether or not they're involved with the program on an ongoing basis. And we'll drop the link for kind of an e-mail where you can reach us in our comment form that's open on an ongoing basis in the chat during this presentation.

Thank you, Miriam. So now I'm going to chat about our 2024 to 2025 evaluation results. So again, this is our evaluation of the program year that started in June 2024 and ran through May of 2025.

So one of the main things that we look at for the program each year is how much of the program budget was awarded from each sub-program. This is an important metric for us because often we find that impacts pretty directly follow the number of projects that each sub-program is able to implement.

And so knowing what portion of the budget has been allocated is kind of a good way to monitor sub-program success. So within the different sub-programs, we saw that the residential solar small sub-program was able to award 72% of its budget. And

this sub-program had a big increase in the number of projects submitted that started during the second-half of this 2024 to 2025 program year. So project volume was really increasing, but the program wasn't able to award its full budget before the program year concluded. Within the residential solar large sub program, we saw that this sub program as in prior years did not award a large portion of its budget. So this is kind of consistent with what we've seen previously. And I'll just note that the residential solar small and residential solar large budgets do combine partway through the program year. So this dollar amount becomes available for both small and large projects at about the six month mark. For nonprofit public facilities, we saw that this subprogram awarded 91% of its project funds, which again is pretty consistent to what we've seen in prior program years. And then community solar awarded 77% of its program funds. How does that translate into the actual number of projects and actual new capacity for the different sub-programs? This slide shows the number of approved projects, the number of energized projects, the total approved project capacity, and the percent of the new approved capacity that came from each sub-program.

The main thing that I want folks to take away is just that we see the highest number of projects come through the residential solar small sub-program, but most of the new capacity for Illinois Solar for All comes from the community solar sub-program. And that's just because community solar builds larger projects that are designed to serve more households than residential solar small. But these are kind of the two main subprograms that drive a lot of the differences in project volume and capacity that we see year over year.

So looking at some trends for the program year over year that we've seen, we do see that project new capacity added through the program has increased every year that our team has evaluated the program. So we have the most new solar capacity added in the 2024 to 2025 program year. Some things that kind of drove this large increase in new capacity, the first is the community solar sub program, which you can see on this dark blue line here. There was a lot more community solar capacity installed in 2024 to 2025 than in prior years. And this was a result of some additional funding that was made available to the community solar sub program, so they were able to fund more projects.

The other trend that I want to note is that, again, the residential solar small sub program started to see a big increase in project volumes, which was much higher than it had seen previously in like '21 to '22 and '22 to '23. The project volume was not as high as what we saw in 2023 to 2024. However, in 2024 to 2025, we had a large number of different vendors submitting projects to the program. Whereas 2023 to 2024 was mostly driven by a single vendor who submitted a large backlog of projects.

And so 2024 to 2025 was notable because of this variety of vendors we had submitting to the program, because that is a little bit more indicative that we may see the increase in project volume continue. And in fact, we haven't seen a large number of projects submitted to residential solar small through 2025, 2026 and 2026, 2027. 2025 is PY 7. That is correct. Yeah, I wasn't sure what nomenclature the group used most frequently. So yeah, some possible drivers of this increase in residential solar small projects, our team wanted to look into kind of what was behind this. Some of the potential hypotheses that we heard were that some uncertainty around federal incentives, was pushing approved vendors more towards state and local funding than maybe they had been previously. We also, again, saw this influx of new vendors, which when we spoke to the Elevate team, they had noted they had done some additional outreach to vendors in central and southern Illinois, so possibly the additional new vendors in the program helped contribute to the increase in projects. And then we also heard directly from a few vendors that they had done additional outreach in 2024 to 2025, and they attributed the increase in projects to that. Those were the different hypotheses we heard. There was kind of no definitive theme that emerged around this increase in residential solar small, the increase in projects there. I did want to quickly just ask the group if there's kind of anything else that you all have observed that might help explain kind of the increased demand that we've seen for residential solar small in recent years. And I'll pause for folks to either you know, come off of mute and provide input or if you want to drop in the chat. This is something we continue to look into because it's a trend that we're seeing over time and we just want to understand if it's going to, you know, continue into future program years.

Okay, nice. That's good to know. Thank you, Kyle, for sharing that.

Okay. Well, I'll keep chatting, but definitely keep dropping your thoughts in the chat

as you have them.

So, I talk through kind of the volume of projects that we saw and some of the trends in terms of capacity, in terms of the impacts that we saw kind of resulting from all of those new projects. The slide just summarizes kind of the statewide impacts of the program. So looking at all the projects approved in 24-25 or PY 7, we saw that there was a total of 29.5 megawatt hours of new solar added to the grid. We expect this to produce 49.8 gigawatt hours of electricity within the first year of production. Just to kind of make those numbers a little bit more concrete.

The first-year emissions reductions associated with those projects are equivalent to powering 6,271 homes for a year or taking 3,871 cars off the road for a year. We also look at some impact based on energized projects because some details about solar projects are only finalized after the projects are energized. So looking at kind of the total number of projects from the start of the program through 2024 to 2025, we're projecting \$116 million in bill savings over the lifetimes of these systems. And then looking at just the projects that were energized in PY7 or 2024 to 2025, we're estimating that those projects, that's about 1400 of the 1600 projects will generate over 63 million in estimated GDP impacts and then create demand for about 560 jobs statewide.

Something that I always like to highlight related to this program are the participant bill impacts. These bill impacts are something that we really hear over time are kind of one of the main benefits that participants see from their participation in the program. So, this Table shows bill impacts by sub program and then the kind of net savings percentage of bills compared to pre-solar bills that people are realizing. I think some trends to note in this table, the residential solar small sub program far and away tends to produce the largest bill savings benefits for participants. This is largely because small residential solar vendors are able to offer no cost leases to solar participants. So, we see a high portion of these projects that don't have any costs associated with them for participants. So, we're seeing a very high percentage of bill savings compared to people's pre-solar bills for this sub program. And then community solar, we're seeing a lower portion of bill savings for the sub program, just because I think as somebody noted earlier, under Illinois law, people are only able to recover the supply costs associated with community solar, as opposed to both the distribution and taxes and fees. And so, savings per participant tend to be

lower for the sub-program. But we do hear from community solar participants that the sub-program tends to be easier to enroll and participate in than residential solar small.

So, there's kind of a, you know, slightly lower benefit, but slightly easier to access versus higher benefit, but a little bit harder for folks to access. And then I'll note, I think it's probably folks are aware that PV systems interconnected in Illinois on or after January 1st, 2025, are subject to the new net metering rules. So Residential solar small is also being moved towards crediting only supply charges and not delivery charges and taxes and fees as they have in the past.

Yes, I believe these slides will be available afterwards. So yeah, we didn't see a lot of impact of that in this program year because a lot of the systems approved in this program year weren't energized in the same program year, but we anticipate that will be more of a role in future program years. And I'll just quickly open the floor to Lauren because I know you did most of this analysis to see if there's anything that you wanted to add related to bill savings.

LR

Lauren Robinson 46:37

No, I think you covered it all. Like, you know, I see Kai say in the comments that, yeah, going forward, there is going to be a hit there, like you mentioned, Mallika, for the rest small, as more of these systems, all the new systems will be under the new net metering, and so, under this program, since most customers are now getting 0 cost leases, that, you know, 50% savings requirement will still be met, but their bill savings that they're going to be seeing are definitely going to be smaller.

MJ

Mallika Jayaraman 47:19

I also want to review some of our social impact results. So this slide is about the portion of project funding that is awarded to environmental justice communities, and then it also covers the amount of funding that is awarded within the Comed Service territory as opposed to the rest of Illinois.

The reason that we look at the portion of funding awarded within Comed Service territory is just to understand approximately how much of funding is going to kind of the northern part of the state as opposed to the central and southern parts of the state, because that is something that we have heard in the past be a concern among

stakeholders.

So starting with the environmental justice community portion of things, just as a reminder, 25% of funding is set aside for environmental justice communities, and that funding is held for the entire program year. So if the funding is set aside for environmental justice community projects, it must be awarded to those types of projects.

What I have on this slide is the percent of funding awarded to environmental justice communities out of all of the approved project funds. So basically, this looks just at the portion of the program budget that was actually awarded. And what we're looking to understand is just like how close to that kind of 25% benchmark we see the funding get in terms of just the awarded projects.

So for community solar, we saw 81% of funding go to projects in EJs. So that is much higher than that 25% benchmark, which is great to see. For nonprofit public facilities, we saw 29% of funding go to projects in environmental justice communities.

And then for residential solar, and this includes residential solar small and large; we saw 22% go to projects in EJs. So that just indicates that there's a little bit of additional project funding that could have gone to environmental justice communities that were not awarded in that program year.

Looking at the geographic distribution of funding for community solar, we saw that in 2024 to 2025, 100% of funding was awarded in the Comed service territory. I do want to note that because of the small number of projects in the community solar sub program, we see a lot of fluctuation in that percentage each year. So, in prior years, we've seen 50% of community solar funding go to environmental justice communities, 20%, like it's kind of fluctuated year over year. So, I would take this just as a snapshot in time as opposed to a larger trend. For nonprofit public facilities, we saw 28% of funding go to the Comed service territory. So, this program has typically been a little bit better than the other two, or the other three, I should say, subprograms at reaching more parts of the state. And then within residential solar, we saw 75% of funding go to the Comed service territory. And this is actually a lot more aligned with what we would expect in terms of like the population of Illinois is about 70% in the Comed service territory. So, 75% is a lot closer to 70%, than what

we've seen in prior years where like 90% of the residential solar funding or more than 90% has gone to the Comed Service territory. So residential solar actually seems to be doing a little bit better than it has done previously at reaching more parts of the state, which is a positive trend in our minds.

Just running through some of our findings in terms of successes and challenges that we heard about from vendors and participants, as well as Grassroots Educators, we grouped vendors and participants together here because they had some similar feedback on some challenges with program processes.

For successes, we, again, as I mentioned earlier, continue to see participants report high satisfaction with bill savings. And then in terms of vendors, we saw the highest vendor participation in this program year to date. I think we had 25 unique vendors submitting projects across the four sub-programs and 17 of those were joining the program for the first time. So again, there was this big increase in kind of new vendors entering the program. In terms of challenges, we hear from both participants and vendors that the program complexity and amount of paperwork required can be difficult to navigate. So as in prior years, we heard that the AV portal and the program paperwork are just challenges for participating in this program. For participants, some of the specific challenges they face include finding vendors that are active in their part of the state and who are accepting new projects. And then from residential solar small participants in particular, we hear that they can face some difficulties during the installation period of their projects.

Some specific challenges that we heard about for small vendors include challenges accessing upfront capital to fund the cost of projects before Rec's payments are paid out, as well as more challenges getting sufficient staff to fill out program paperwork. And then we continue to hear from some participants that when they first hear about the program, they think it's too good to be true, and they're worried about it being a scam. So, some challenges among vendors and participants that I would say are pretty consistent to what we've heard in prior years.

From Grassroots Educators, some of the successes that our team heard about were that there had been some improvement in technical support and training from Elevate. So, Grassroots Educators appreciated this. We also heard some positive feedback on the new website being easier to navigate, as well as having more

materials available in Spanish.

Some of the challenges that Grassroots Educators raised included promoting the program only to have limited participation opportunities in some areas. And this was driven primarily either by lack of available approved vendors or there not being available community solar subscriptions in some areas. We also heard from Grassroots Educators that they wanted more clarity around when to hand off an interested participant from themselves to either Elevate or approve vendors. And then Grassroots Educators raised a few specific needs related to program materials, including more information focusing on Solar Basics, since this is often something that Grassroots Educators need to educate participants about. More materials specific to the nonprofit public facilities program, and then more information available translated into Spanish.

And again, if you're somebody who's, you know, an approved vendor or grassroots educator and you have additional insights to add here, welcome those in the chat or in our question period, which is almost here. So finally, I just wanted to review a few of the program recommendations that our team included in the report. And these are just some of the key ones that we identified, but there are additional recommendations in that full report.

So one recommendation we have is just to create more structured participant support, such as customer concierge or someone who can reach out to participants at key project milestones. We just hear very consistently that participants are looking for more support as they navigate this program and want a little bit more handholding.

The second recommendation we had was to improve transparency, both around vendor availability and program timelines. So even though there is information on the Illinois Solar for All website about which vendors are accepting new projects, we're hearing from participants that they're still sometimes not hearing back from those vendors or hearing those vendors aren't accepting new projects. So potentially adding a date that accepting new projects status was updated, or I think Elevate may also be exploring, or the program may be exploring, requiring vendors to keep that status up to date as part of their participation in the program.

And then the other thing we heard about wanting more transparency around was program timelines. So, in some cases, people aren't able to get their project funded during the initial submission window, and they want to know when additional funding will become available.

The third recommendation we have is just strengthening coordination among approved vendors, Grassroots Educators, job trainees, and the Illinois Solar for All program. Again, we pretty consistently hear from these different groups that they just want to know more about what some of the other groups they may be collaborating with are working on and want more opportunities to connect with each other. And then the final thing we had was just something that, again, we hear consistently from approved vendors, a request to seek opportunities to streamline documentation and approve vendor portal functionality over time. And with that, I will open it up to any questions folks may have or any discussion. I think we probably have time for a few questions. Okay, well if nothing immediate is coming to mind, I may go ahead and pass it off to Lauren to talk through the energy sovereignty results.

LR

Lauren Robinson 58:07

Okay, thanks, Mallika. Yeah, so we did a study this past year of the addition of energy sovereignty to the Illinois Solar for All program. I go to the next slide.

So for a little bit of background here, Energy Sovereignty was introduced to Illinois Solar for All at the start of the PY 22-23 program year. To participate in the Energy Sovereignty Subprogram, a project needs to be owned by the customer. And that ownership needs to occur within seven years of system Energization. 25 percent of funds within each of the sub programs are reserved for the energy sovereignty participation in the program year.

I think that does also open up at some point in the program year to allow for other types of participation. For distributed generation projects, they receive an additional rec adder in their program incentive. This is usually referred to as a \$10 per rack adder, although projects don't necessarily receive \$10 per rack. This is based off of the proportion of a 15-year contract lifespan that the customer owns a project. So for example, if a project was transferring ownership from an approved vendor to a customer after five years, that means a customer would own the project for 10 years,

10 out of 15 years, so they would receive two-thirds of that \$10 or \$6 and sixty-seven cents. There is no rec adder for the community solar sub-program, although projects do receive prioritization in the selection process. Next slide, please.

So for our research, we had a few research questions we were looking into. The first was what are the values, benefits, and risks of energy sovereignty for participants and approved vendors looking across the difference of programs. And the second was trying to understand what drove the increase in energy sovereignty participation in the residential small and nonprofit public facility programs in PY24-25. To answer these questions, we had a number of research activities. One was looking at historical program tracking data. We also spoke with approved vendors who had participated with projects in energy sovereignty specifically to understand their experience with their program and motivations of customers. And then finally, we evaluated some case studies, which we'll walk through in a few slides for each of the sub-programs to understand the financial implications of the energy sovereignty REC Adder. Next slide, please.

So energy sovereignty has been growing year over year. This table here shows energy sovereignty participation in the first three program years that it was part of the program. We have a column for each sub-program to show how many projects were submitted in that program year, along with how many are still currently active as sometimes projects drop out of the program. So this was based off of data that was available in May of 2026. So you can see there was a large increase in participation in the residential small sub program from 5 projects to 565 projects submitted, along with a significant increase in the nonprofit public facilities, 19 projects in the first year, 37 in Py 24, 25. And that's 37 out of 41 overall projects submitted that year.

Residential Solar large overall in Illinois Solar for All does not see very much participation, and that is also the case in the energy sovereignty. So 0 in the first tier, up to two in Py 24, 25. And then within the community solar sub program, there were two projects that had submitted to the program, but neither of those were still active at the time of our evaluation. And just generally, overall, community solar projects within Illinois Solar for All drop out of the program at higher rates. We've seen like 26% of community solar projects over these past three years have

dropped out compared to 10% of distributed generation projects. So those projects face many challenges to moving forward with the program and dropping out of energy sovereignty might not necessarily have been driven by the energy sovereignty requirements specifically. Next slide, please.

So here I want to focus on our case study findings. So how we did these case studies is we looked at what a typical project would be in each of the sub programs, and then understand it, try to understand what those project costs would be along with the available incentives for projects. So, this chart here shows our case study for the residential solar small sub program, where we were evaluating a project that would be sized at 7.2 kilowatts.

That's the average size of projects from the three program years that we were looking at. And based on the dollar per watt cost that we saw in the most recent program year, we estimated that the project cost would be around \$27,853 for this project. So that's that blue bar. Then you see those two green bars on the left side of the chart. This is showing the available stack incentives for a typical project that we believe Avs and customers would take advantage of. The reason why there are two bars here is because the Recs incentives through Illinois Solar for All do differ depending on whether a customer, a customer's independent system operator is MISO or PJM. So where they're located within the state, they get different incentive levels. So in the residential solar small case, we see, you know, if a customer takes advantage of the federal ITC at 30%, they will receive \$8,400.

If they also were able to layer on smart inverter rebates, which are available from Comed and Ameren, they would be able to receive an additional \$2,900. And then depending on their ISO, they would receive Illinois Solar for all what we refer to as the base rack. Without participation in energy sovereignty, that value would be, you know, somewhere between \$26,000 and \$27,000. And I think Kyle alluded to this earlier in the chat. These are very large incentive amounts that already covered, more than cover the entire cost of a project. The energy sovereignty amount that we assume a typical project would receive in this case would be \$870. So insignificant in this situation, we're assuming a project which transfers a little over five years after the project was energized. And that's because a lot of approved vendors plan transfers to

happen in that time frame so that they can ensure they receive the full ITC amount and don't trigger any recapture of that federal tax.

So these findings along with what we heard from approved vendors about energy sovereignty and how important they are for it is for residential small customers show us that even without energy sovereignty, these projects would likely, you know, move forward. Participants don't necessarily know or are not really told about the nuances of energy sovereignty, and a lot of them don't necessarily care whether they own their system or if it's third-party owned. Next slide.

So things get a little bit different when we talk about the nonprofit public facilities subprogram. In our case study, we see that our stacked incentives still do stack up to be above the projected project cost in our typical project example where we're seeing, you know, somewhere between \$587,000 and \$646,000 in potential incentives compared to a 500K cost.

However, there's a few things at play here. Once the ITC is not available, the Recs amounts are definitely at a closer level to the project cost and incentives through the program become more important. We also heard that nonprofit public facilities do care about ownership of their systems, whether it's their boards, donors, or congregations that, you know, want to know that they own their systems. They are more concerned about the timing of when ownership transfers occur.

And so, it is used as a selling point and a point of interest for customers. In addition, the estimated energy sovereignty at or amount of \$20,000 is more significant for the approved vendor and does help them cover a few additional costs, more so than the \$870 on the small resi side. Next slide, please.

Our third case study looks at residential solar large. So just a reminder, we didn't see very much participation in this sub-program. You know, overall, the incentives do not stack up to cover the entire project costs. And while our understanding that this is by design of the Recs amounts for Illinois Solar for All, we do think that, you know, this is part of what limits participation here. There are a number of additional administrative burdens for property managers or owners to participate in Illinois Solar for All relative to some of the other distributed generation project

subprograms, and they're not necessarily being compensated for the project costs in the same way.

When federal solar funding is phased out, the importance of energy sovereignty will, you know, will increase as it will become a larger part of the overall incentives that are available, but they are still pretty small here at, you know, estimated at \$36,000 on a project cost of over \$650,000. Next slide.

Finally. We're going to talk about a few results related to energy sovereignty in the community solar sub program. So, a reminder, the community solar sub program does not receive a rec adder for participation. At the time that we were doing this evaluation, we understood that there were two community solar projects that were active in the program that qualified for energy sovereignty. Through speaking with approved vendors, we got a sense of what might be the motivation for participating in energy sovereignty, along with some barriers. So, in terms of motivation, there are some potential long-term benefits for participants to have more control and avoid risks of third-party ownership.

With respect to barriers to participation in energy sovereignty, it's possible that it's more difficult to acquire funding for the project overall because of the structure of energy sovereignty where ownership needs to transfer within a shorter period of time. There's less opportunity for investors to recoup their investment within that short time before ownership transfers to subscribers. And that might make it more difficult to secure financing for that type of project. Next slide.

Through our research, we came up with a few recommendations that we think would help the program offer and improve the experience for participants.

First, we do think it would be worthwhile for the program to re-evaluate the effectiveness of the energy sovereignty rec adder, particularly within the residential solar small sub program. You know, as we showed, it is a very small incentive.

A piece of the pie compared to the project cost. And, you know, if the Illinois Solar for All incentives remain at the level that they are right now, they will be covering more than the project costs are estimated at this point in time. So, depending on how you know, Illinois Solar for All Recs might change in the future, we recommend also considering the place of energy sovereignty rec adders for the residential solar

sub-program, while still considering that projects could be incentivized to participate in energy sovereignty through prioritization in the project selection process. Next slide.

There were a number of administrative challenges that we found through our discussions with Elevate and the approved vendors. One of the primary causes of confusion and administrative overhead relates to defining the date of the transfer of ownership from approved vendors to customers. So approved vendors must define the proposed date of transfer at the time of the part one application. And then they are held to that proposed date of transfer in terms of the amount of money that they can receive as a proportion of the energy sovereignty rec adder, as well as, if they don't transfer within two years of that date, then the entire project incentives are taken back from them, both the energy sovereignty incentives and the overall Illinois Solar for All incentives. So, if the approved vendor, for whatever reason, got that date wrong, like completely wrong of when they believed that Energization would happen and the proposed transfer would happen, that could have significant financial impact for them, as well as just confusion for them and overall administrative burden to adjust the matter amount that they receive. So, we recommend allowing updates to the proposed transfer date at the part 2 application, which would ease that administrative burden. Next slide.

A few of our other recommendations, a few Avs struggle to initially navigate program requirements, so we recommended developing additional self-service training materials for approved vendors. And then a lot of the program material references a \$10 rec adder which we did hear from approved vendors caused confusion and frustration when they did not receive the full \$10. So, we recommend changing that language as well as providing an estimate to approved vendors of the amount of the rec adder that they will receive. Next slide.

That is everything here. I tried to speed up at the end because I know we have a lot more to cover. Mallika, I'm sorry. But I don't know if we have time for questions or if anyone has questions. I'll turn it back to you, Mallika.



Mallika Jayaraman 1:17:34

Yeah, I think, again, we can take a couple questions if folks have anything or comments, if folks want to make comments. Well, in the interest of time, I will keep

us moving. But this section is where we kind of want to hear from you all. So just to give you a quick snapshot of our upcoming evaluation activities, in the coming year, we have our annual evaluation of the 2025 to 2026 program year or program year 8 planned, so we will be doing that. We also have a couple different special topic reports planned. The first one is barriers to participating in Illinois Solar for All in rural Illinois. The second one is planning ahead for the phase out of the investment tax credit. We did choose these topics in partnership with IPA, but also based on some of the comments that we heard you all share on things you were interested, I think last time we spoke, which was about a year ago. We do also still have one additional topic where we are looking into potential topics that we could explore. And if we're not able to cover something in this special topic report, we also do sometimes have the ability to add additional analyses to the annual report. So definitely just interested in anything that folks want to hear us look into.

In terms of the data collection activities we have planned, we are planning to do participant research with participants from all sub programs with the exception of residential solar large. We've just had a really hard time getting in touch with the residential solar large participants and when we do get in touch, we tend to find that their projects are unique.

So it's hard for us to kind of extrapolate the findings from one participant to the whole program. So we're deferring research on this sub program for this year, but we'll likely look into adding it again in future years. Another thing we're doing with participants, which we're excited about, is we will be attending some Grassroots Educators events and speaking to participants, or I should say potential participants who are learning about the program for the first time.

In the past, we've only heard from people who kind of completed the participation process for Illinois Solar for All. So we're really looking forward to hearing from people who haven't even enrolled in the program yet to see kind of what their reactions to information about the program are and like what barriers they may face that may prevent them from ever enrolling in the program.

We also will be speaking with the Grassroots Educators who are attending events just to get their perspective on if what we're hearing from participants is kind of typical.

We know we're attending a very small number of events and that Grassroots Educators host a ton more throughout the year. So, we definitely want their help in interpreting what we hear from participants.

For approved vendors, we've been doing ongoing surveys with this group, actually in real time. So, we've kind of finished the surveys for the program year 2025 to 2026 evaluation but are still surveying vendors in the current program year, both about some of the special topic reports we're doing, and we're also kind of trying to get their real time feedback on the current program year for the upcoming evaluation. In terms of Workforce Development, we'll be doing interviews with job training program administrators, given the small number of job trainees and the fact that we spoke to them as part of 2024 to 2025. We will not be speaking to them as part of 2025 to 2026, but again, we'll probably look into adding them in the future. And then we will be talking for the first time to LIHEAP administering agencies. The program has an energy connector tool that is used to connect LIHEAP subscribers or LIHEAP recipients with community solar subscriptions. So, we're speaking with LIHEAP agencies to understand what that process looks like and how it will be used as part of the program's new referral process to connect those LIHEAP recipients with community solar subscriptions. And then finally, we're speaking to the program administrator, program staff from IPA and Elevate about the current status of the program. And we'll also be speaking with Illinois Shine staff specifically for a special topic report on barriers to participation in rural Illinois to understand if there's anything that Illinois Shines is doing that Illinois Solar for All can implement.

I apologize, we did run a little long on our presentation time, but I guess I think I'll skip just to this kind of discussion slide. And I would be really curious to hear just if there's anything that we're not planning to do that you all think we should be doing, you know, any groups or individuals who we're not talking to, who we should be talking to, any specific topics you want to see covered. And then yes, I can also ask a few questions about any of the content that we presented today. I do see, Janice, that you had a question about if there's an interface for participants to get more information on energy sovereignty. My understanding, and correct me if I'm wrong, Lauren, is no, there's not a specific resource for that, that it's mostly that vendors are the ones who are providing information about the program to participants.



Lauren Robinson 1:23:42

Yeah, I think that's right.

Yeah, I think your vendor would have either offered it to you as an option or decided not to for whatever reason.



Mallika Jayaraman 1:24:00

Okay. Yeah, and then I think we also heard within the energy sovereignty research that some vendors were just kind of signing folks up for an energy sovereignty project. And obviously that would be, I think, included in the contract language, but they might not like specifically highlighting that as part of the participation. Janice, I'm curious, is there anything you would have liked to have heard about energy sovereignty as part of your participation.

Definitely, it's definitely a hard concept, I think, to explain it to folks. So, appreciate that that can definitely be a challenge. Jennifer, did you have some wrap up that you wanted to do? I realized that we're getting pretty tight on time.



Jennifer Brown 1:25:19

What I suggest that we could do, because we know that you had some discussion questions. We can provide those discussion questions via e-mail on a document and allow the advisory committee to reply back with their responses, which gives them a little bit of time to think through those questions rather than try to squeeze it in in a few minutes or to have to run over our time. So how does that sound to you, Mallika?



Mallika Jayaraman 1:25:55

That sounds good. Yeah, thanks for that suggestion.

CLOSING



Jennifer Brown 1:25:58

Okay, we can definitely do that in our follow-up communication. So, we are just about at the end of our presentation. Thank you so much to ESource for your presentation and all of that amazing information. We really appreciate the partnership that we have. We're not going to take any additional questions because we will provide space for you to do that in an e-mail.

But we did want to share that our next meeting, our next quarterly meeting, will take place in January. We have not set the date yet, but you will receive communication regarding our next meeting in the next coming weeks. We also wanted to share with you that more information about the program administrator transition will be forthcoming to your e-mail as well. I know that there's some communication that's being prepared to give you a little bit more details about that. So, keep your eyes and ears peeled for that information. But for the most part, we always appreciate your time, and we thank you so much for taking the time to attend today's meeting. Look in your e-mail in the next 7 to 10 business days for opportunities to provide some feedback to the eSource team regarding their upcoming evaluation topics.

Thank you again for all of your support and your support of Illinois Solar for All, and we hope that you have a wonderful evening.



Jennifer Brown stopped transcription