



# Official Rules: The American-Made Sunny Awards for Equitable Community Solar

THESE RULES ARE EFFECTIVE APRIL 20, 2023



# Contents

<b>Contents .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1 Community Solar Meaningful Benefits .....	4
<b>2 Contest and Awards To Win.....</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1 Awards To Win .....	5
2.2 Competitor Types .....	6
2.3 Teaming .....	6
2.4 Awards Process .....	7
2.5 Semifinalist Recognition .....	7
2.6 Sunny Finalist Awards .....	7
2.7 Sunny Grand Prize Awards .....	7
2.8 Meaningful Benefits Awards.....	7
2.9 Additional Recognition .....	8
<b>3 Important Dates.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>4 Eligibility Requirements.....</b>	<b>10</b>
4.1 Overall Eligibility Requirements (Required for All Submissions).....	10
4.2 Number of Submission Packages Allowed .....	11
4.3 Team Requirements.....	11
<b>5 How To Enter and What To Submit .....</b>	<b>12</b>
5.1 How To Enter .....	12
5.2 What To Submit .....	12
5.3 Submission Materials .....	12
<b>6 How We Score .....</b>	<b>27</b>
6.1 Review Process .....	27
<b>7 Program Policy Factors.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>8 Key Terms .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>9 Additional Requirements.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Appendix A: Additional Terms and Conditions .....</b>	<b>32</b>
A.1 Universal Contest Requirements.....	32
A.2 Submission Rights.....	32
A.3 Copyright .....	33
A.4 Contest Subject to Applicable Law .....	33
A.5 Resolution of Disputes.....	33
A.6 Publicity .....	33
A.7 Liability .....	33
A.8 Records Retention and Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) .....	34
A.9 Privacy .....	34
A.10 General Conditions .....	35
A.11 Additional Eligibility Requirements .....	35
<b>Appendix B: Community Solar Meaningful Benefits and Examples of Eligible Submissions. 36</b>	
B.1 Meaningful Benefits Details .....	37



# 1 Introduction

As a part of the [Justice40 Initiative](#), the White House set a goal to achieve a decarbonized electricity system by 2035 and a decarbonized energy sector by 2050. To ensure an equitable clean energy transition, the initiative directs 40 percent of the benefits of certain federal investments to flow to disadvantaged communities.

Community solar will play a pivotal role in achieving these goals. Community solar is defined by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) as any solar project or purchasing program in which the benefits of a solar project flow to multiple customers, such as individuals, businesses, nonprofits, and other groups, within a certain geographic area. Community solar allows all community members to access the meaningful benefits of renewable energy, particularly those with low to moderate incomes, renters, and those for whom traditional rooftop solar is unavailable.

The [National Community Solar Partnership](#) (NCSP), a program of the DOE Solar Energy Technologies Office (SETO), supports a coalition of stakeholders working to expand access to affordable community solar to every U.S. household. NCSP is working toward a 2025 target to enable community solar to power the equivalent of five million households and generate a cumulative \$1 billion in energy bill savings.

The American-Made Sunny Awards for Equitable Community Solar (the Sunny Awards) recognize community solar project portfolios and state and utility programs that develop or employ best practices that can be used to scale equitable access to the [meaningful benefits](#) of community solar. These benefits include low- to moderate-income (LMI) household access, greater household savings, increased resilience, community ownership, and equitable workforce development and entrepreneurship.

The Sunny Awards will initially award:

- Up to 30 Finalist Awards at \$2,500 each

From the up to 30 Finalists, the NCSP will award an additional\*:

- Up to 15 Meaningful Benefits or Engagement Awards at \$5,000 each
- Up to five Grand Prize Awards at \$10,000 each.

*\*Finalists can win either an additional Meaningful Benefits/Engagement Award or Grand Prize Award, not both. Please find more information on award amounts and eligibility in [Section 2: Contest and Awards to Win](#).*

Competitors in the Sunny Awards must be based in the United States or its territories. Project portfolio submissions must include at least one and up to five community solar projects based in the United States or its territories that were energized after January 1, 2020, and at least six months prior to submission. State and utility program submissions must have a lead applicant that is a state, territory, tribal, local government or utility entity. State and utility programs must support at least one project that was energized after January 1, 2020, and at least six months prior to submission that provides at least two of the Meaningful Benefits described in Section 1.1.

**Deadline:** Submissions are due by July 14, 2023, at 5:00 p.m. (Eastern) on HeroX.



**Timeline:** Finalist Awards will be announced and funding will be distributed in September 2023. Meaningful Benefits Awards, Engagement Awards, and Grand Prize Awards will be announced and funding will be distributed in early 2024.

**Questions:** Please address any questions to the Sunny Awards prize administrator at [sunnyawards@nrel.gov](mailto:sunnyawards@nrel.gov).

## 1.1 Community Solar Meaningful Benefits

The Sunny Awards will recognize and promote the best practices developed by community solar project portfolios, state, and utility programs that have developed scalable models to successfully deliver two or more of the Meaningful Benefits listed in Table 1.

**Table 1. Meaningful Benefits Recognized by the Sunny Awards**

Meaningful Benefits	Criteria for Project Portfolio, State, and Utility Programs
LMI Household Access	Include or support at least 40% of subscribers from LMI households. (See <a href="#">Key Terms</a> for guidance on how to define LMI households.)
Greater Household Savings	Provide or support at least a 20% reduction in annual electricity bills and/or provide financial benefits equivalent to a 20% bill reduction for all residential subscribers to a project.
Resilience and Grid Benefits	Include or support the capability to deliver power to households and/or critical facilities during a grid outage and/or strengthen grid operations through strategic siting, demand response, and other actions.
Community Ownership	Include or support community ownership of, or equity in, project and/or portfolio assets. Community ownership may also include other wealth-building strategies such as community benefit agreements.
Equitable Workforce Development and Entrepreneurship	Support community workforce development by advancing high-wage opportunities, reducing income disparities across demographic groups, ensuring a trained and available workforce that is reflective of the community, and creating a safe working environment and pathways to union membership. Project portfolios and programs should also ensure that women- and minority-owned businesses have equitable opportunity.

*Table 1 describes the Meaningful Benefits recognized by the Sunny Awards. Note that, to receive any level of recognition or award, a project portfolio, state, and utility program must meet the criteria in at least two of the Meaningful Benefits Categories: increased LMI household access, greater household*



savings, resilience and grid benefits, community ownership, and equitable workforce development and entrepreneurship.

Additional Engagement Awards will be given to community solar project portfolios, state, and utility programs that have developed or support innovative models based on the innovative engagement processes that have allowed widespread community participation and inclusive outreach, as described in Table 2. Please note that, to be eligible, community solar project portfolios, state, and utility programs must also include at least two of the Meaningful Benefits listed above.

**Table 2. Engagement Awards**

Engagement Award Category	Criteria for Project Portfolio, State and Utility Programs
Community Participation Award	Demonstrate or support innovative, replicable, inclusive, and authentic community engagement and participation practices that enable community input to drive portfolio outcomes.
Inclusive Outreach Award	Demonstrate or support successful communications campaigns that set and achieve ambitious goals to increase solar energy adoption or solar workforce recruitment and retention.

*Table 2 describes the Engagement Award Categories recognized by the Sunny Awards. Note that, to receive any level of recognition or award, a project portfolio, state or utility program must also meet the criteria for at least two of the Meaningful Benefits: increased LMI household access, greater household savings, resilience and grid benefits, community ownership, and equitable workforce development and entrepreneurship.*

For more details on the Meaningful Benefits and Engagement Awards, as well as examples of eligible project portfolios or state or utility programs, please see [Appendix 2](#).

## 2 Contest and Awards To Win

The Sunny Awards competition includes three different types of awards. Competitors will submit a project **portfolio, state, or utility program** that demonstrates replicable and scalable best practices for providing meaningful benefits to community solar subscribers or their communities. To do so, competitors will complete the submission narrative and provide the required evidence detailed in the [What To Submit](#) section of this document.

### 2.1 Awards To Win

The Sunny Awards will deliver up to \$200,000 in cash prizes to winning competitors.

The Sunny Awards will initially award:

- Up to 30 Finalist Awards at \$2,500 each

From the up to 30 Finalists, the NCSP will award an additional\*:

- Up to 15 Meaningful Benefits Awards or Engagement Awards at \$5,000 each



- Up to five Grand Prize Awards at \$10,000 each.

*\*Finalists can win either an additional Meaningful Benefits Award/Engagement Award or Grand Prize Award, not both.*

In addition, the NCSP may award Semifinalist Awards (nonmonetary recognition) to submissions that meets the criteria for at least two Meaningful Benefits.

## 2.2 Competitor Types

Competitors may submit a submission package to the Sunny Awards for a community solar project **portfolio, state, or utility program**.

- Community solar project **portfolios** are a collection of individual community solar projects.<sup>1</sup> Project portfolios include at least one and up to five individual community solar projects of at least 8.5 kW and any installation type (rooftop, ground mount, etc.). All projects in a project portfolio must align with the DOE definition of community solar (see the [Eligibility Requirements](#) section below).
  - For project portfolios with multiple projects, all projects included must meet the minimum eligibility requirements (see the [Eligibility Requirements](#) section below). Portfolios will be evaluated holistically, and competitors are encouraged to submit projects with a broad range of geographic diversity.
  - All projects within a portfolio must have been placed into service on or after January 1, 2020, and must have been energized (the project has been placed in service and delivering both electricity and benefits) and subscribed for at least six months prior to submission in order to be eligible.
- Community solar **state or utility programs** are state-, tribal-, territory-, municipal- or utility-run initiatives to enable, incentivize, or otherwise support the development of multiple community solar projects within a specific jurisdiction (typically a state, tribal, municipal, or territory boundary or a utility territory). Programs may be of any size. State-level enabling legislation is not required. To be eligible, programs must have been developed or had a significant update after January 1, 2020, and must include at least one project that has been energized and subscribed for at least six months prior to submission.

## 2.3 Teaming

Competitors may be an individual entity or a team of entities. DOE will only review one submission per community solar project portfolio, state, or utility program, so entities that have worked together on the development of a community solar project portfolio are encouraged to participate as a team and coordinate submitting a submission package. If the same community solar portfolio or state or utility program is submitted by multiple community solar project portfolio organizations, including the same project submitted as a part of two different portfolios, DOE will only review one submission based on its determination of which is the stronger application. If applying as a team, please review the [Team Requirements](#) section below.

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<sup>1</sup> DOE defines a project as an individual community solar installation or array.





## 2.4 Awards Process

Initial submissions will be screened by DOE for potential Semifinalist Recognition and Finalist Awards. Winners of the Finalist Awards will then have their submissions reviewed and scored by a panel of external reviewers using the scoring guidance in this document. DOE and its prize administrator will use these scores, the supporting evidence provided, and follow-up interviews as needed to determine the winners of the Grand Prize and the Meaningful Benefits and Engagement Awards.

## 2.5 Semifinalist Recognition

*Strong evidence + Meets Criteria for at least **two** Meaningful Benefits*

Any competitor that meets the criteria for at least two Meaningful Benefits will be recognized on the NCSP webpage and in a public announcement. Submissions must include appropriate, complete, and verifiable evidence of the best practices employed by the competitor's project portfolio or state or utility program to provide at least two Meaningful Benefits. Semifinalist Recognition does not come with any cash prize. The competitors recognized as Semifinalists will be evaluated for Finalist Awards by DOE reviewers using the scoring guidance in this document.

## 2.6 Sunny Finalist Awards

*Strong evidence + Meets Criteria for at least **two** Meaningful Benefits*

Up to 30 of the competitors selected for the Semifinalist Recognition will be selected for a Finalist Award and will receive a cash prize of \$2,500. These competitors will then be evaluated for the Grand Prize, Meaningful Benefit or Engagement Awards by a panel of external reviewers using the scoring guidance in this document.

## 2.7 Sunny Grand Prize Awards

*Strong evidence + Meets Criteria for at least **two** Meaningful Benefits*

Up to five finalist awardees will be selected as Grand Prize Award winners and will receive \$10,000 in prize money for project portfolios, state, or utility programs that demonstrate or support exemplary and replicable best practices for delivering meaningful benefits *across multiple categories*. DOE may make public and promote the tactics and best practices developed by Grand Prize Award winners through web content and other media. Sunny Grand Prize Award winners will not be eligible for Meaningful Benefits Awards or Engagement Awards.

## 2.8 Meaningful Benefits Awards

*Strong evidence + Meets Criteria for at least **two** Meaningful Benefits*

Up to 15 of the 30 Finalist awardees will be selected for a Meaningful Benefit Award or Engagement Award and will receive an additional cash prize of \$5,000 (for a potential total of \$7,500 in cash prizes). This recognition will highlight the attributes and best practices that set each winning project portfolio, state, or utility program apart in the following categories:

1. LMI Household Access
2. Greater Household Savings



3. Resilience and Grid Benefits
4. Community Ownership
5. Equitable Workforce Development and Entrepreneurship
6. *Engagement Award: Community Participation*
7. *Engagement Award: Inclusive Outreach*

DOE may make public and promote the tactics and best practices developed by Meaningful Benefits Award and Engagement Award winners through web content and other media. One submission (project portfolio, state, or utility program) may win *either* a Grand Prize Award *or* a Meaningful Benefit/Engagement Award, but not both.

## 2.9 Additional Recognition

DOE will publicly recognize the full team listed in the submission for each winner. Monetary prizes will be delivered to the team lead identified in the project portfolio's, state, or utility program's submission (see the [Team Requirements](#) section for more details).

Grand Prize, Meaningful Benefit, and Engagement Award winners will be publicly announced by DOE and invited to participate in a series of DOE-hosted webinars on community solar best practices. Winners' best practices will also be used to develop a collection of case studies to encourage greater adoption of these practices.





## 3 Important Dates

Please visit <https://www.herox.com/2023sunnyawards> to view the key dates for each round of the awards program.



# 4 Eligibility Requirements

Competitors in the Sunny Awards must comply with the eligibility requirements below. By uploading a submission package, a competitor certifies that they are in compliance with these eligibility requirements. Eligibility is subject to verification before awards are announced and payments are disbursed.

## 4.1 Overall Eligibility Requirements (Required for All Submissions)

- **Community solar definition:** Community solar project portfolios, and projects supported by state and utility programs must fit within the DOE definition of community solar: “a solar project or purchasing program, within a geographic area, in which the benefits of a solar project flow to multiple customers such as individuals, businesses, nonprofits, and other groups.”
- **Geographic location:** Project portfolios, state and utility programs must be based in the United States or its territories.
- **Date energized:** All projects within a project portfolio must have been placed in service after January 1, 2020. Community solar state and utility programs must have been launched or have had significant updates after January 1, 2020. The nominated project portfolio must only contain projects that have been energized for at least six months prior to submission. The nominated state or utility program must support at least one project that has been energized for at least six months prior to submission.
- **Customer type:** The nominated project portfolio or projects supported by a state, tribal, district, municipal or utility program must serve at least 50% residential customers (i.e., does not provide a majority of its capacity to commercial entities, nonprofits, or other anchor tenants).
- **Project size:** The minimum size for an individual project is the average single residential household size, or 8.5 kW. There is no restriction on the maximum size of an individual solar project to be eligible to compete in this prize.
- **Legislation requirements:** State-level enabling legislation is not required for project eligibility; however, the benefits realized by the project portfolio or by the projects supported by a state or utility program may not be dependent on *pending* legislation or regulation.
- **Past participation:** Projects, state, or utility programs that have received a Grand Prize in prior Sunny Awards rounds are not eligible for additional prizes of any kind. Projects, state, or utility programs that have received a Meaningful Benefits Special Recognition Award in prior Sunny Award rounds are only eligible for Finalist and Grand Prize awards (they will not be eligible for a second Meaningful Benefit Award or an Engagement Award). Projects, state, or utility programs that have received a finalist award but have not received a Grand Prize or Meaningful Benefit Special Recognition Award in prior Sunny Awards rounds are eligible for all prizes included in this round of the Sunny Awards.
- **Meaningful benefits:** To be eligible for a Semifinalist Recognition or a Finalist Award, project portfolios must provide evidence demonstrating that they meet the criteria for **at least two** of the Meaningful Benefits in this [Table](#). State or utility programs must provide evidence demonstrating that at least one project supported by their program meets the criteria for **at least two** of the Meaningful Benefits. To be eligible for a Grand Prize, portfolios or state and utility programs must provide evidence demonstrating they meet the criteria in **at least two** of the Meaningful Benefits.



## 4.2 Number of Submission Packages Allowed

**For Project Portfolios:** Competitors (individual entities or portfolio teams) may submit only one portfolio submission package, inclusive of at least one and up to five individual community solar projects. If different submission packages include the same individual community solar project, only the most competitive submission will be reviewed, at DOE's discretion.

**For State and Utility Programs:** Competitors (individual entities or program teams) may only submit one submission package for a community solar program. If different submissions include the same state or utility program, only the most competitive submission will be reviewed, at DOE's discretion.

## 4.3 Team Requirements

Competitors planning to participate as a team must meet the following requirements:

1. A team must have a single legal entity representing the entire team. This entity shall be designated the team lead. The team lead is responsible for complying with all the rules of this prize challenge, including coordinating with its team members, resolving any conflicts, working with DOE and its prize administrator, responsibly allocating resources, submitting all required materials, and complying with all guidance and restrictions.
2. Any cash prizes awarded will be sent to the team lead. The team lead will be responsible for distributing any cash prizes among project portfolio or program team members. DOE is not responsible for resolving any disputes among team members.
3. The team lead must be able to receive payments that are legally made from the United States in U.S. dollars or designate a team member that can. To receive prize money, the team lead must be a member of NCSP. [Register to join NCSP here.](#)
4. For project portfolio-focused teams only, we encourage the team to include and prioritize funds for the portfolio's community partner.
5. For program-focused teams only, the team lead must be an electric utility, an electric cooperative, a municipal power company, or a state, local, or tribal government entity.



# 5 How To Enter and What To Submit

## 5.1 How To Enter

Complete a submission package online at <https://www.herox.com/2023sunnyawards> before the contest closing date.

## 5.2 What To Submit

A complete submission package for the Sunny Awards should include the following items:

- Cover page content
- PowerPoint summary slide
- Narrative describing the project portfolio, state, or utility program and how it delivers the community solar benefits described in this document (not to exceed 2,000 words)
- Supporting evidence for the benefits provided.

Submission packages may also include:

- Photos, videos, or program materials for projects included in a project portfolio, state, or utility program
- Additional supporting documentation, including news articles and letters of support.

## 5.3 Submission Materials

The following details provide guidance on what information to provide and how judges will evaluate and score your submission. Judges will evaluate your submission by agreeing or disagreeing with assigned statements on a 1–6 scale.

See the tables below for details about each of the items and review the [How We Score](#) section for information about how we score.

**Cover Page Information** – List basic information about your submission (to be completed on the HeroX platform: <https://www.herox.com/2023sunnyawards>)

- Community solar project portfolio, state, tribal, district, municipal or utility program name (public)
- Brief project description (public)
- Team lead organization name and contact information (public)
- Partner organization names (public)
- (Project portfolio only) The city, state, and nine-digit zip code for each project in the portfolio
- (State or utility program only) The program's state(s)
- Project portfolio (per project) or program size (kW or MW capacity)
- (State or utility program only) The number of projects supported by the state or utility program
- Percentage of residential subscribers or percentage of commercial/anchor subscribers
- Date when the program was launched or when each project in the project portfolio was energized and fully operational. (\*Note that projects must be energized and subscribed for at



least six months to be eligible. State or utility programs must support at least one project that has been energized and subscribed for at least six months to be eligible.)

- Submission categories – select as many as apply. (\*Note that the program or all the projects in the project portfolio must comply with the criteria of at least two categories in order to be eligible for any Sunny Award. Category points are cumulative, so state or utility programs or project portfolios that provide benefits across more categories will receive more points toward the Sunny Award Grand Prize.) (public)
- Single PowerPoint slide summarizing the project portfolio, state, or utility program (public).



**Narrative:** All competitors should provide responses to the prompts in Section 1. In Section 2, competitors should provide responses to the prompts for any category for which they would like to be considered for a Meaningful Benefits or Engagement Award. Competitors must respond to at least two meaningful benefit categories to be eligible for any Sunny Award. The aggregate response to these four sections must not exceed 2,000 words. The reviewers will score the sections based on the content you have provided.

**250 words per section, for a maximum of 2,000 words**

**Section 1: Tell us about your project portfolio, state, or utility program** (background information, 250 words maximum).

**Example content to provide**

- Briefly describe the development timeline of your community solar project portfolio, state, or utility program, from conception to operation or implementation (bullet points are acceptable).
- Describe the subscribers and the community/communities served by the project portfolio, state, or utility program.
- Describe the roles of the project portfolio, state, or utility program team members and how team members worked together to support the project portfolio, state, or utility program.
- (Project portfolio only) What practices have you replicated across the projects in your project portfolio to provide meaningful benefits, and how easy would it be for you to build a similar project again? Examples of this can include financial structure, subscription models, outreach, or other replicable program elements.

**This section is scored on a 1–6 scale**

The statement comprehensively outlines the development timeline of the project portfolio, state, or utility program.

The statement has a complete description of the types of communities the state or utility program or project portfolio serves.

The statement includes a clear description of the roles of project portfolio, state, or utility program team members.

(Project portfolio only) The statement has a clear description of the replicability of projects within the portfolio.

**Section 2: Tell us about the meaningful benefits the project portfolio or state or utility program is delivering.**



Project portfolio submissions must be able to demonstrate that their community solar project portfolio provides at least two of the five Meaningful Benefits listed below (categories 1–5) in order to be eligible for any Sunny Award or recognition. State and utility program submissions must be able to demonstrate that their state or utility program supports at least one project that provides at least two of the five Meaningful Benefits to be eligible for any Sunny Award or recognition. Details on supporting evidence can be found in [Section 5](#). (250-word maximum per category.)

**Category 1: LMI Household Access**

**Project portfolio:** Please describe the following:

- The percentage of LMI subscribers (minimum of 40% required for eligibility)
- How LMI subscribers are acquired and verified
- Differences between LMI and market rate subscription benefits, if any
- Any other relevant information about LMI subscriptions.

How does your project portfolio achieve this level of LMI household enrollment and benefits? Consider and describe these elements:

- Specific financing or other funding (including grants or settlements and RECs)
- State or utility program/policy incentives or requirements
- Unique business model
- Any other elements vital to providing LMI subscriptions.

**State and utility programs:** Please describe the following:

- How many projects supported by your program include at least 40% LMI households
- Percentage of LMI household delivered by projects supported by your program
- How projects supported by your program verify households and what they include in subscription terms
- Any other relevant program support for enrolling LMI households.

How does your program support LMI household participation? Consider and describe these elements:

- Financing or other program funding
- State program/policy incentives or requirements
- Any other support provided through the program.

**This section is scored on a 1–6 scale**

The narrative demonstrates a strong level of LMI household engagement in the project portfolio, state, or utility program, with at least 40% of the residential subscribers being LMI households.

The narrative demonstrates the project portfolio, state, or utility program elements that support LMI household participation.





<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Category 2: Greater Household Savings</u></b></p> <p><b>Project portfolio:</b> Please describe the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage of bill savings (minimum of 20% required for eligibility)</li> <li>• How bill savings are calculated</li> <li>• How bill savings are distributed among subscribers</li> <li>• At what intervals bill savings are distributed</li> <li>• How bill savings are credited</li> <li>• Any other relevant information about bill savings for this project portfolio.</li> </ul> <p>How does your project portfolio achieve these bill savings? Consider and describe these elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific financing or other funding (including grants or settlements and Renewable Energy Credits (RECs))</li> <li>• State or utility program/policy incentives or requirements</li> <li>• Unique business model</li> <li>• Any other elements vital to achieving bill savings.</li> </ul> <p><b>State and utility programs:</b> Please describe the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How many projects supported by your program provide at least 20% bill savings</li> <li>• Percentage of bill savings delivered by projects supported by your program (minimum of 20% required for eligibility)</li> <li>• How projects supported by your program calculate and distribute bill credits</li> <li>• Any other details on bill savings for projects supported by your program.</li> </ul> <p>How does your program support these bill savings? Consider and describe these elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing financing or other program funding</li> <li>• State program/policy incentives or requirements</li> <li>• Any other support provided through the program.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>This section is scored on a 1–6 scale</b></p> <p>The narrative demonstrates how subscriber bill credits are allocated and provides evidence of at least 20% bill savings on average.</p> <p>The narrative demonstrates the project portfolio, state, or utility program elements that allow for or support the bill savings delivered.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Category 3: Resilience and Grid Benefits</u></b></p> <p><b>Project portfolio:</b> Please describe the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do any projects within the project portfolio include battery storage?</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>This section is scored on a 1–6 scale</b></p> <p>The narrative demonstrates that the community solar project portfolio, state, or utility program</p>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the capacity of the battery storage in the project portfolio (kWh)?</li> <li>• Can the batteries provide backup power in the event of an outage? If so, for how long?</li> <li>• Is there an emergency power outage plan, including who runs battery power and impacted subscribers?</li> <li>• Are there any additional forms of resilience provided by the projects in the project portfolio (i.e., microgrids, demand and response/virtual power plant, community resilience hubs, or other relevant concepts)?</li> </ul> <p>How does your project portfolio achieve this resiliency? Consider and describe these elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific financing or other funding (including grants or settlements and RECs)</li> <li>• State or utility program/policy incentives or requirements</li> <li>• Unique business model</li> <li>• Other elements vital to providing resilience.</li> </ul> <p><b>State and utility programs:</b> Please describe the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How many projects supported by your program include battery storage or other forms of resilience</li> <li>• What types of battery storage or other forms of resilience (i.e., microgrids, demand and response/virtual power plants, resilience hubs, etc.) are delivered by the projects supported by the state or utility program</li> <li>• Beneficiaries of the storage/resiliency from the projects supported by the state or utility program</li> <li>• Any other relevant state or utility program elements around resilience.</li> </ul> <p>How does your state or utility program support resiliency? Consider and describe these elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financing or other program funding</li> <li>• State program/policy incentives or requirements</li> <li>• Any other support provided through the program.</li> </ul>	<p>provides power in the event of a grid outage or strengthens grid operations through demand response and other actions.</p> <p>The narrative demonstrates the project portfolio, state, or utility program elements that support resilience.</p>
<p align="center"><b><u>Category 4: Community Ownership</u></b></p> <p><b>Project portfolio:</b> Please describe the following:</p>	<p align="center"><b>This section is scored on a 1–6 scale</b></p>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What percentage of the project portfolio is community owned?</li> <li>• What are the specific benefits of community ownership in this project portfolio (i.e., voting rights, project equity, dividends or financial returns, ability to claim tax credits, etc.)?</li> <li>• What are some of the specific terms of community ownership in this project portfolio (i.e., membership fees, contract length, participation requirements, etc.)?</li> <li>• Any other relevant information on community ownership.</li> </ul> <p>How does your project portfolio achieve this community ownership? Consider and describe these elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific financing or other funding (including grants or settlements and RECs)</li> <li>• State or utility program/policy incentives or requirements</li> <li>• Unique business model</li> <li>• Other elements vital to supporting community ownership.</li> </ul> <p><b>State and utility programs:</b> Please describe the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How many community-owned projects are supported by the program</li> <li>• What types of models of community ownership are developed by projects supported by the program</li> <li>• Any other relevant program information regarding community ownership.</li> </ul> <p>How does your state or utility program achieve community ownership? Consider and describe these elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financing or other program funding</li> <li>• State program/policy incentives or requirements</li> <li>• Any other support provided through the program.</li> </ul>	<p>The narrative demonstrates how the project portfolio, state, or utility program provides opportunities for community ownership or wealth-building.</p> <p>The narrative demonstrates the project portfolio, state, or utility program elements that support community ownership.</p>
<p><b><u>Category 5: Equitable Workforce Development and Entrepreneurship</u></b></p> <p><b>Project portfolio:</b> Please describe the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any specific project labor agreements that require the use of women-owned or minority-owned businesses (WMBEs) and/or reduce income disparities across race and gender lines</li> </ul>	<p><b>This section is scored on a 1–6 scale</b></p> <p>The narrative demonstrates how the project portfolio, state, or utility program provides opportunities for equitable workforce development, including union labor, project labor</p>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any union labor used</li> <li>• Any training programs used, including pathways to full-time employment</li> <li>• Number of full-time hires resulting from training programs or apprenticeships</li> <li>• Any other relevant workforce development information.</li> </ul> <p>How does your project portfolio achieve this equitable workforce development? Consider and describe these elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific financing or other funding (including grants or settlements and RECs)</li> <li>• State or utility program/policy incentives or requirements</li> <li>• Unique business model</li> <li>• Other elements vital to supporting equitable workforce development and entrepreneurship.</li> </ul> <p><b>State and utility programs:</b> Please describe the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How many projects supported by the program include workforce development or entrepreneurship activities</li> <li>• What kinds of workforce development or entrepreneurship benefits (i.e., training programs, use of union labor, prevailing wage, etc.) are delivered by projects supported by the state or utility program</li> <li>• Any other relevant program details on equitable workforce development and entrepreneurship.</li> </ul> <p>How does your state or utility program achieve equitable workforce development? Consider and describe these elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financing or other program funding</li> <li>• State program/policy incentives or requirements</li> <li>• Any other support provided through the program.</li> </ul>	<p>agreements, training programs, etc.</p> <p>The narrative demonstrates the project portfolio, state, or utility program elements that support equitable workforce development.</p>
<p><b><u>Category 6: Community Participation</u></b></p> <p><b>Project portfolio:</b> Please describe the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How the project teams solicited feedback from community members on project design</li> <li>• How community input led to changes in project design (i.e., project siting, subscription terms, benefit delivery, etc.)</li> </ul>	<p><b>This section is scored on a 1 – 6 scale</b></p> <p>The narrative demonstrates how the project portfolio, state, or utility program used community engagement to implement design changes, including project siting,</p>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Any other relevant information on community engagement.</li> </ul> <p><b>State and utility programs:</b> Please describe the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Any program efforts to solicit feedback from community members that led to changes in state or utility program design</li> <li>How many projects supported by the state or utility program included community participation</li> <li>Any program support or incentives for community-led project design (i.e., project siting, subscription terms, benefit delivery, etc.)</li> <li>Any other relevant program information for community participation.</li> </ul>	<p>subscription terms, benefits delivery, program design, etc.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Category 7: Inclusive Outreach</u></b></p> <p><b>Project portfolio:</b> Please describe the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Any communication campaigns in the project portfolio, including target audiences and objectives</li> <li>Communication channels leveraged during the campaign(s)</li> <li>Results of communication campaign(s) (qualitative or quantitative metrics tracked)</li> <li>Any other relevant information on inclusive outreach.</li> </ul> <p><b>State and utility programs:</b> Please describe the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Any communication campaigns delivered by projects supported by the program, including target audiences and objectives</li> <li>What communication channels were leveraged during the campaign(s)</li> <li>Results of the communication campaign(s) delivered by the projects supported by the program (qualitative or quantitative metrics tracked)</li> <li>Any other relevant information on inclusive outreach.</li> </ul>	<p><b>This section is scored on a 1–6 scale</b></p> <p>The narrative demonstrates how the project portfolio, state, or utility program provides opportunities for inclusive outreach.</p>



State and Utility Programs or Project Portfolio Materials (required) (not public)		
Section 5: Supporting Evidence		
<b>General Supporting Materials</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (State and Utility Programs only) Official program materials or guidance</li> <li>• (Project portfolio only) Documentation of permission to operate or interconnection agreement from your utility, or registration of facility RECs for each project in your portfolio</li> <li>• Single PowerPoint slide describing the portfolio or program (see template).</li> </ul>		<b>Each category is scored on a 1–6 scale</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High-quality evidence: 4–6 points</li> <li>• Low-quality evidence: 1–3 points.</li> </ul>
Category 1: LMI Household Access		
<b>Goal:</b> LMI households have equitable access to participation in community solar project portfolios and state and utility programs that allow them to realize the benefits of the clean energy transition.		
Criteria	Suggested Evidence (State and Utility Programs)	<b>Suggested Evidence (Project Portfolio)</b> <i>*Provide evidence for each project submitted in a project portfolio</i>
At least 40% of the residential subscribers to a community solar project portfolio (inclusive of all projects within a portfolio) or state and utility program are LMI households.	(High quality) Official program materials that include language supporting participating community solar project portfolios to include at least 40% LMI households among their subscribers <b>and</b> documentation of how your state or utility verified LMI household enrollment from at least one project that includes at least 40% LMI households <b>(do not include PII)</b> .  (Low quality) Survey results or other anecdotal evidence that portfolios within the community solar program include at least 40% LMI households.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (High quality) Approval documents from a state or utility program confirming the percentage of LMI household subscribers <b>(do not include PII)</b>.</li> <li>• (Low quality) Project portfolio or project promotional materials that include language about reserved or subsidized subscriptions for LMI households.</li> </ul>
Category 2: Greater Household Savings		



<b>Goal:</b> Community solar project portfolios and state and utility programs provide electricity bill savings that lower the amount households spend on energy relative to their income.		
Criteria	Suggested Evidence (State and Utility Programs)	<b>Suggested Evidence (Project Portfolio)</b> <i>*Provide evidence for each project submitted in a portfolio</i>
Project portfolio (inclusive of all projects submitted under a portfolio), state, and utility programs must reduce the electricity bills of residential subscribers by at least 20% on average over the course of a year.	<p>(High quality) Official program materials or grant agreements that include language supporting bill savings of 20% or more for residential subscribers <b>and</b> documentation of how your state or utility verified these savings from at least one project that is providing 20% or more savings (<b>do not include personally identifiable information (PII)</b>).</p> <p>(Low quality) Customer testimony or qualitative reports indicating bill savings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (High quality) Residential subscription contract highlighting language that guarantees bill savings of 20% or more for residential subscribers (<b>do not include PII</b>).</li> <li>• (High quality) Documentation from a state or utility program that the project portfolio meets requirements for a 20% or greater bill savings.</li> <li>• (Low quality) Customer or subscription manager testimony of reported bill savings.</li> </ul>
<b>Category 3: Resilience and Grid Benefits</b> <b>Goal:</b> Community solar projects and state and utility programs provide access to power in the event of a power outage to subscribers and their communities, including residences and critical facilities or resilience hubs, and/or strengthen the local grid through demand response and other actions.		
Criteria	Suggested Evidence (State and Utility Programs)	<b>Suggested Evidence (Project portfolio)</b> <i>*Provide evidence for each project submitted in a portfolio</i>





The community solar project portfolio (inclusive of all projects within the portfolio) or state or utility program includes some form of battery storage, microgrid capabilities, or a demand response feature that can provide power during an outage or otherwise contribute to fewer outages on a local grid.	<p>(High quality) Official program materials that demonstrate support for connection to a storage system, from an on-site battery to a community solar facility or microgrid, <b>and</b> documentation of how your state or utility verified resilience benefits from at least one project that includes storage or microgrid capabilities.</p> <p>(Low quality) Anecdotal evidence of battery/storage connection despite a lack of specific requirements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (High quality) Official documentation, such as electrical permits or utility agreements, of connection to a storage system, from an on-site battery to a community solar facility or microgrid. Includes specifications such as kWh capacity.</li> <li>• (Low quality) Picture or other proof of battery/storage purchase without specifics and without proof of installation.</li> </ul>
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#### Category 4: Community Ownership

**Goal:** Community solar project portfolios and state and utility programs provide an opportunity for subscribers and their communities to build wealth and have democratic control over energy generation through community ownership or other avenues for community wealth-building.

Criteria	Suggested Evidence (State and Utility Programs)	<b>Suggested Evidence (Project Portfolio)</b>  <i>*Provide evidence for each project submitted in a portfolio</i>
Local community members, subscribers, or local community organizations have equity in each of the projects in the community solar project portfolio or state or utility program (including partnership flip models, where ownership will be transferred after tax equity is realized) or the project portfolio or state or utility program includes other wealth-building strategies, such as community benefit agreements.	<p>(High quality) Official program materials that document support for community ownership of community solar projects or inclusion of a Community Benefit Agreement <b>and</b> documentation of how your state or utility verified community ownership from at least one project supported by your program that is community-owned.</p> <p>(Low quality) Anecdotal evidence or survey responses that describe the ownership structures of participating projects.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (High quality) Business charter or other documentation that demonstrates the project portfolio's ownership structure.</li> <li>• (High quality) Official Community Benefit Agreement contract demonstrating community wealth-building opportunities.</li> <li>• (Low quality) Promotional materials (website, articles, etc.) that demonstrate the project portfolio's ownership structure.</li> </ul>



<b>Category 5: Equitable Workforce Development and Entrepreneurship</b> <b>Goal:</b> Community solar project portfolios and state and utility programs support equitable development of and access to quality jobs in a local clean energy workforce.		
Criteria	Suggested Evidence (State and Utility Programs)	<b>Suggested Evidence (Project Portfolio)</b>  <i>*Provide evidence for each project submitted in a portfolio</i>
The community solar project portfolio (inclusive of all projects within the portfolio) or state or utility program advances high wages; reduces income disparities across race, gender, or other demographic lines; ensures a trained and available workforce that is reflective of the community where projects are located; and creates a safe working environment.	<p>(High quality) Program materials describing support for equitable workforce development, including use of union labor; professional training requirements; specific details on training, certification, licensure, etc.; <b>and</b> documentation of how your state or utility verified workforce or entrepreneurship benefits from at least one project that includes equitable workforce development supported by your program.</p> <p>(Low quality) Program materials describing educational or workforce development opportunities associated with the projects, without specifics.</p>	<p>(High quality) Documentation of Project Labor Agreements (collective bargaining agreements between unions and contractors that govern the terms and conditions of all workers on a construction project).</p> <p>(High quality) Official Community Benefit Agreement contract demonstrating access and training pathways for underrepresented populations.</p> <p>(Low quality) Company report summarizing average wages, benefits, percentage of women or minority workers.</p>
<b>Category 6: Engagement Award - Community Participation</b> <b>Goal:</b> Project portfolios and state and utility programs employ innovative models that ensure that the design and benefits distribution are driven by community input and meet the unique needs of the local community.		
Criteria	Suggested Evidence (State and Utility Programs)	<b>Suggested Evidence (Project Portfolio)</b>  <i>*Provide evidence for each project submitted in a portfolio</i>



Community solar project portfolios or state or utility programs implement inclusive and authentic community participation practices that ensure that community input drives project outcomes.	<p>(High quality) Official program materials supporting the use of authentic community participation for participating community solar projects, <b>and</b> documentation of how your state or utility verified authentic community participation from at least one project supported by your program.</p> <p>(High quality) Testimony or other evidence from local community organizations verifying authentic community participation in state or utility program design.</p> <p>(Low quality) Anecdotal evidence of communities that have that have authentically participated in the design in the design of participating community solar projects.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (High quality) Testimony from local community organizations verifying authentic community participation throughout the development of the community solar project portfolio.</li> <li>• (Low quality) Meeting notes, agendas, or sign-in sheets from community participation activities.</li> </ul>
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#### Category 7: Engagement Award - Inclusive Outreach

**Goal:** Project portfolios and state and utility programs develop successful communications campaigns that set and achieve ambitious goals to increase solar energy adoption or solar workforce recruitment and retention.

Criteria	Suggested Evidence (State and Utility Programs)	Suggested Evidence (Project Portfolio)  <i>*Provide evidence for each project submitted in a portfolio</i>
Community solar project portfolios and state and utility programs implement communications campaigns that are successful in increasing solar energy adoption and/or solar workforce recruitment and retention among a diverse target audience. These campaigns cross a variety of mediums, including digital, print, event, video, mobile, podcast, social media, audio, and more, and have a positive,	(High quality) Examples of campaign content, including but not limited to digital, print, event, video, social media, podcast, mobile, or audio elements.	(High quality) Examples of campaign content, including but not limited to digital, print, event, video, social media, podcast, mobile, or audio elements.



meaningful impact on their target audience.		
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**Special Note on Supporting Evidence:** “Supporting Evidence,” lists the *suggested* evidence that competitors can provide to demonstrate the impact of their project portfolio, state, or utility program in each category. This suggested evidence is classified as either high- or low-quality evidence. If the suggested evidence cannot be included with the submission, please provide the strongest alternative evidence possible or justification for why evidence cannot be provided for that category. Evidence should be appropriate, complete, and verifiable, according to the guidelines below:

#### Appropriate

- Is the evidence submitted relevant to the criteria for the Sunny Awards and/or a specific category of award?
- Is the evidence clearly linked to the project portfolio or state or utility program being nominated?

#### Complete

- Does the evidence cover the required time period (at least six months prior to submission)?
- Is the evidence recent (within one year)?
- Does the evidence contain all the information necessary to evaluate a project portfolio or state or utility program?

#### Verifiable

- Does the evidence come from a reputable source? Does that source stand behind the evidence?
- Is there a way to confirm the accuracy of the evidence?

### Additional Supporting Documentation (Optional)

Attach up to five one-page letters of support or articles (e.g., news or press) about the project portfolio, state, or utility program from other relevant entities to provide context and evidence to support your written submission. These must be written by third-party entities or organizations and should provide supporting evidence that your project portfolio met the goals of this awards program.

Examples of entities that may express support could include but are not limited to businesses, nonprofits, media outlets, elected officials, community leaders, and members of the target audience. Letters that support the claims made in your written narrative and serve as evidence of your success will likely increase your score. General letters of support from parties that are not affected by or related to your campaign will likely not factor into your score. Please do not submit multipage letters.

### Reviewer Recommendation



There is no direct corresponding submission requirement for this score. Rather, it is an overall assessment of all materials submitted in HeroX. This includes supporting documentation, if provided.	<b>Statement is scored as a 1 or 6.</b>
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## 6 How We Score

The Sunny Awards will recognize community solar project portfolios, state, and utility programs that employ replicable best practices to make a positive, meaningful impact on the subscribers and communities that the community solar project portfolio serves. Excellent submissions will provide evidence that their project portfolio or state or utility program enables equitable access to the meaningful benefits of community solar and that it demonstrates scalable and replicable best practices that can support the community solar industry in reaching its targets.

To be recognized by the Sunny Awards, competitors must be able to demonstrate that the projects in their community solar project portfolio or state or utility program provide at least two of the five Meaningful Benefits listed in Table 1. These Meaningful Benefits, as well as the two Engagement Awards, also represent the Meaningful Benefits Awards in which applicants can be recognized. Details on the requirements for each category can be found in the [Eligibility Requirements](#) section.

### 6.1 Review Process

The scoring of submissions will proceed as follows:

- The prize administrator will first ensure that all submissions are eligible to compete. DOE reserves the right to reassign submissions to from a state or utility program to a project portfolio or vice versa.
- Internal reviewers from DOE will select semifinalists and finalists.
- A panel of external expert reviewers will read, score, and provide comments on each submission. Each category of the review criteria will receive a score from 1 to 6 (see table below). The final score from an individual reviewer for a submission package equals the sum of the scores for all the categories. Category points are cumulative, so state or utility programs or project portfolios that provide benefits across more than two categories will receive more points toward a Sunny Award Grand Prize.
- All reviewers' scores will then be averaged for a final reviewer score for the submission package. The final awards judge considers reviewer scores when determining the winners of the awards.

1	2	3	4	5	6
strongly disagree	disagree	slightly disagree	slightly agree	agree	strongly agree

The awards administrator, at its sole discretion, may decide to hold a short interview with a subset of the competitors. Interviews would be held prior to the announcement of winners and would serve to help



clarify questions the judge may have. Attending interviews is not required, and interviews are not an indication of winning.

For the Meaningful Benefit Awards, DOE retains the right to alter the maximum number of winners in each category, depending on the number and quality of submissions in each category.

The judge's final determination of winners takes reviewer scores, discussions with reviewers (if applicable), interview findings (if applicable), and the program policy factors listed in Section 7 (below) into account. DOE is the judge and final decision maker and may elect to award all, none, or some of the submissions accepted at each submission deadline.

## 7 Program Policy Factors

Although the scores of the expert reviewers will be carefully considered, it is the role of the awards administrator to maximize the impact of the contest benefits. Some factors that are outside the control of competitors and beyond the independent expert reviewers' scope of review may need to be considered to accomplish this goal. The following is a list of such factors. In addition to the reviewers' scores, the below program policy factors may be considered when determining winners:

- Geographic diversity of potential winners
- Diversity in project portfolio or program type (state program, utility-led program, third party-developed project, community-owned project, etc.)
- Whether the DOE recognition is nonduplicative and compatible with the stated goals of this program and DOE's mission
- The degree to which the submission will accelerate the adoption of best practices to provide meaningful, transformational changes in equitable access to community solar energy and its benefits among audiences and in areas that are underserved by existing efforts by the U.S. solar market
- The degree to which the submission supports and complements DOE's existing programs and strategies to achieve DOE goals
- The degree to which the submission expands DOE engagement with new audiences and recipients that have not been supported by DOE in the past.
- The degree to which the submission exhibits team member diversity and the inclusion of underrepresented groups, with participants including but not limited to graduates and students of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and other minority-serving institutions (MSIs), members operating within [Qualified Opportunity Zones](#), disadvantaged communities identified by the [Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool](#) or other underserved communities, or members from minority business enterprises, minority-owned businesses, woman-owned businesses, or veteran-owned businesses.



## 8 Key Terms

**Authentic community engagement:** Authentic community engagement includes practices through which community members define and drive the outcomes of the decision-making process to ensure that benefits accrue to the community. When community members are authentically engaged, project developers are accountable and responsive to community priorities and needs, and the outcomes of a program or project will clearly reflect the priorities of community members.

**Community benefit agreement:** Community benefit agreements are legal agreements between community benefit groups and developers, stipulating the benefits a developer agrees to fund or furnish in exchange for community support of a project. Benefits can include commitments to hire directly from a community, contributions to economic trust funds, local workforce training guarantees, and more. Community benefit agreements are strategic vehicles for community improvement that can also provide benefits to private-sector developers and both state and local governments.

**Disadvantaged communities (DACs):** The Office of Management and Budget Interim Guidance defines a community as either a group of individuals living in geographic proximity (such as census tract), or a geographically dispersed set of individuals (such as migrant workers or Native Americans), where either type of group experiences common conditions. The DOE working definition for DACs has been developed by an internal and external collaborative research process and includes data for 36 indicators collected at the census tract level. These 36 indicators can be grouped across the following categories (numbers in parentheses show how many indicators fall in that category): fossil dependence (2), energy burden (5), environmental and climate hazards (10), and vulnerability (socioeconomic, housing burden, transportation burdens, etc.) (19).<sup>2</sup>

**Energy insecurity:** The inability of a household to meet its basic heating, cooling, and energy needs over time.

**Frontline communities:** Communities that experience the greatest impacts and consequences of climate change. These are often communities of color that were placed in the least desirable areas, often with high exposure to pollution and climate impacts such as flooding.

**Meaningful benefits:** Through stakeholder request for information feedback and other stakeholder engagements, NCSP has identified key outcomes of community solar programs and projects that should benefit subscribers and their communities. The five community solar outcomes that have been identified as meaningful benefits are: (1) greater household savings, (2) LMI household access, (3) resilience and grid benefits, (4) community ownership, and (5) equitable workforce development and entrepreneurship.

**Low- to moderate-income (LMI):** Definitions for LMI vary. For this prize, we are looking for project portfolios or programs that serve LMI populations. In your submission, you must identify the definition you are using. If the state where the project(s) or program is located has an applicable LMI definition, you should use that applicable LMI definition. If your state does not have a definition for LMI populations, or if your project portfolio contains projects across multiple states, you are encouraged to use the federal definition for LMI, which is households at or below 200% of the federal poverty level, or households earning 80% or below of the area median income as defined by the most recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

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<sup>2</sup> Source: <https://www.energy.gov/diversity/justice40-initiative>.





**Socially and economically disadvantaged individuals (SEDIs):** Individuals who have had their access to credit on reasonable terms diminished compared to others in comparable economic circumstances, due to their:

- Membership of a group that has been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudice or cultural bias within American society
- Gender
- Veteran status
- Limited English proficiency
- Disability
- Long-term residence in an environment isolated from the mainstream of American society
- Membership in a federally or state-recognized American Indian tribe
- Long-term residence in a rural community
- Residence in a U.S. territory
- Residence in a community undergoing economic transitions (including communities impacted by the shift toward a net-zero economy or deindustrialization)
- Membership in an underserved community.



## 9 Additional Requirements

Please read and comply with the additional requirements in Appendix A.

**COMPETITORS WHO DO NOT COMPLY WITH THESE REQUIREMENTS MAY BE DISQUALIFIED.**



# Appendix A: Additional Terms and Conditions

## A.1 Universal Contest Requirements

Your submission for the Sunny Awards is subject to following terms and conditions:

- You must post the final content of your submission or upload the submission form online at <https://www.herox.com/2023sunnyawards> before the awards close. Late submissions or any other form of submission do not qualify.
- The cover page, narrative, and letters of commitment/support are not intended to be made public; however, see [Section A.8](#) regarding the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).
- You must include all the submission's required elements. The awards administrator may disqualify your submission after an initial screening if you fail to provide all required submission elements. Competitors may be given an opportunity to rectify submission errors due to technical challenges.
- Your submission must be in English. Any attachments must be in a readable and searchable PDF format. Scanned handwritten submissions will be disqualified.
- Competitors will be disqualified if, during any engagement with the Sunny Awards, including but not limited to the submission, online forum, emails to the awards administrator, or other forms of communication, contains any matter that, in the discretion of DOE, is indecent, lacking in professionalism, or demonstrates a lack of respect for people or life on this planet.
- If you click "Accept" on the HeroX platform and proceed to register for the awards described in this document, these rules will form a valid and binding agreement between you and DOE and are in addition to the existing HeroX Terms of Use for all purposes relating to these contests. You should print and keep a copy of these rules. These provisions only apply to the contests described here and no other contests on the HeroX platform or anywhere else.
- The awards administrator, when feasible, may give competitors an opportunity to fix nonsubstantive mistakes or errors in their submission packages.

## A.2 Submission Rights

The submission materials in this contest must be submitted and released to the public under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) (see <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

By making a submission and consenting to the rules of the contest, a competitor is granting to DOE, the awards administrator, and any other third parties supporting DOE in the contest, a noncommercial license to display publicly only the parts of the submission package designated as "public." This license includes posting or linking to the public portions of the submission on the administrator's or HeroX's applications, the contest website, DOE websites, and partner websites, and the inclusion of the submission in any other media, worldwide. The submission may be viewed by DOE, the awards administrator, and the judges for purposes of the contests, including but not limited to screening and evaluation purposes. The awards administrator and any third parties acting on its behalf will also have the right to publicize the competitors' names and, as applicable, the names of competitors' team members and organizations that participated in the submission, on the contest website indefinitely.

By entering, the competitor represents and warrants that:



The competitor is the sole, original author and copyright owner of the submission or that the competitor has acquired sufficient rights to use and to authorize others, including DOE, to use the submission as specified throughout the rules; that the submission does not infringe upon any copyright, trade secret, trademark, nondisclosure agreement, patent, or any other third-party rights; and that the submission is free of malware.

## A.3 Copyright

Each competitor represents and warrants that the competitor is the sole author and copyright owner of the submission; that the submission is an original work of the applicant, or that the applicant has acquired sufficient rights to use and to authorize others, including DOE, to use the submission, as specified throughout the rules; that the submission does not infringe upon any copyright or upon any other third-party rights of which the applicant is aware; and that the submission is free of malware.

## A.4 Contest Subject to Applicable Law

All contests are subject to all applicable federal laws and regulations. Participation constitutes each participant's full and unconditional agreement to these Official Contest Rules and administrative decisions, which are final and binding in all matters related to the contest. This notice is not an obligation of funds; the final awards are contingent upon the availability of appropriations.

## A.5 Resolution of Disputes

DOE is solely responsible for administrative decisions, which are final and binding in all matters related to the contest.

In the event of a dispute, the authorized account holder of the email address used to register will be deemed to be the competitor. The "authorized account holder" is the natural person or legal entity assigned an email address by an internet access provider, online service provider, or other organization responsible for assigning email addresses for the domain associated with the submitted address. Competitors and potential winners may be required to show proof of being the authorized account holder.

The awards administrator will not arbitrate, intervene, advise on, or resolve any matters between team members or any disputes between teams.

## A.6 Publicity

The winners of these awards (collectively, "Winners") will be featured on DOE and National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) websites as well as in other digital, print, event, video, mobile, podcast, marketing, social media, and audio formats.

Except where prohibited, participation in the contest constitutes each winner's consent to DOE's and its agents' use of each winner's name, likeness, photograph, voice, opinions, and/or hometown and state information for promotional purposes through any form of media, worldwide, without further permission, payment, or consideration.

## A.7 Liability

Upon registration, all participants agree to assume and, thereby, have assumed any and all risks of injury or loss in connection with or in any way arising from participation in this contest or development of any submission. Upon registration, except in the case of willful misconduct, all participants agree to and,



thereby, do waive and release any and all claims or causes of action against the federal government and its officers, employees, and agents for any and all injury and damage of any nature whatsoever (whether existing or thereafter arising, whether direct, indirect, or consequential; and whether foreseeable or not), arising from their participation in the contest, whether the claim or cause of action arises under contract or tort.

In accordance with the delegation of authority to run this contest delegated to the Director of the DOE Solar Energy Technologies Office (SETO), the Director has determined that no liability insurance will be required of competitors to compete in this competition, per 15 USC 3719(i)(2).

## A.8 Records Retention and Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

All materials submitted to DOE as part of a submission become DOE records. Any confidential commercial information contained in a submission should be designated at the time of submission.

Competitors are encouraged to employ protective markings in the following manner:

1. The cover sheet of the submission must be marked as follows and must identify the specific pages containing trade secrets or commercial or financial information that is privileged or confidential:

Notice of Restriction on Disclosure and Use of Data:

Pages [list applicable pages] of this document may contain trade secrets or commercial or financial information that is privileged or confidential and is exempt from public disclosure. Such information shall be used or disclosed only for evaluation purposes. The Government may use or disclose any information that is not appropriately marked or otherwise restricted, regardless of source. [End of Notice]

2. The header and footer of every page that contains trade secrets or privileged commercial or financial information must be marked as follows: "May contain trade secrets or commercial or financial information that is privileged or confidential and exempt from public disclosure."
3. In addition, each line or paragraph containing trade secrets or commercial or financial information that is privileged or confidential must be enclosed in brackets.

Competitors will be notified of any FOIA requests for their submissions in accordance with 29 C.F.R. § 70.26. Competitors may then have the opportunity to review materials and work with a FOIA representative prior to the release of materials.

## A.9 Privacy

If you choose to provide HeroX with personal information by registering or completing the submission package through the contest website, you understand that such information will be transmitted to DOE and may be kept in a system of records. Such information will be used only to respond to you in matters regarding your submission and/or the contest unless you choose to receive updates or notifications about other contests or programs from DOE on an opt-in basis. DOE and NREL are not collecting any information for commercial marketing.



## A.10 General Conditions

DOE reserves the right to cancel, suspend, and/or modify the contest, or any part of it, at any time. If any fraud, technical failures, or any other factor beyond DOE's reasonable control impairs the integrity or proper functioning of the contests, as determined by DOE in its sole discretion, DOE may cancel the contest.

Although DOE indicates that it will select up to several winners for each category, DOE reserves the right to only select competitors that are likely to achieve the goals of the program. If, in DOE's determination, no competitors are likely to achieve the goals of the program, DOE will select no competitors to be winners.

**ALL DECISIONS BY DOE ARE FINAL AND BINDING IN ALL MATTERS RELATED TO THE CONTEST.**

## A.11 Additional Eligibility Requirements

- Individuals who worked at DOE (federal employees or support service contractors) within six months prior to the submission deadline of any contest are not eligible to participate in any award contests in this program. Additionally, members of their immediate families (i.e., spouses, children, siblings, or parents) and anyone who lives in their household, regardless of relation, are not eligible to participate in the prize.
- Entities and individuals publicly banned from doing business with the U.S. government, such as entities and individuals debarred, suspended, or otherwise excluded from or ineligible for participating in federal programs, are not eligible to compete.
- Entities identified by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Binding Operational Directives (BOD) as an entity publicly banned from doing business with the United States government are not eligible to compete. See <https://cyber.dhs.gov/directives/>.
- Entities and individuals identified as a restricted party on one or more screening lists of Departments of Commerce, State, and the Treasury are not eligible to compete. See the Consolidated Screening List: <https://www.trade.gov/consolidated-screening-list>.



# Appendix B: Community Solar Meaningful Benefits and Examples of Eligible Submissions

Greater Household Savings	<p>Project portfolios or state or utility programs provide at least a 20% reduction in annual electricity bills for all residential subscribers to a portfolio.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Example:</b> A project portfolio or state or utility program delivers a monthly electricity bill savings of 20% or more for all residential subscribers.</li> <li>• <b>Example:</b> Monthly bill savings may vary, but the project portfolio or state or utility program provides a 20% average electricity bill savings, compared to nonsubscribers paying the same rates, over the course of at least six months.</li> </ul>
LMI Household Access	<p>Project portfolios or state or utility programs include at least 40% subscribers from LMI households. (See <a href="#">Key Terms</a> for guidance on how to define LMI households.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Example:</b> At least 40% of the number of subscribers to a project portfolio or state or utility program come from LMI households.</li> <li>• <b>Example:</b> At least 40% of the generation capacity of a project portfolio is subscribed to LMI households.</li> </ul>
Resilience and Grid Benefits	<p>Project portfolios or state or utility programs include or support the capability to deliver power to households and/or critical facilities during a grid outage or to strengthen grid operations through demand response and other actions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Example:</b> The project portfolio includes battery storage that is able to deliver 10 hours of emergency backup power to critical facilities.</li> <li>• <b>Example:</b> The project portfolio includes and supplies a microgrid that is able to “island” and continue to deliver power during an outage.</li> </ul>
Community Ownership	<p>Project portfolios or state or utility programs include community ownership of or equity in portfolio assets, which may include other wealth-building strategies such as community benefits agreements or partnership flip models.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Example:</b> Residential subscribers directly purchase and own 25% of the solar panels within a community solar array.</li> <li>• <b>Example:</b> The community solar project portfolio is owned by a member-owned electric cooperative or municipal utility.</li> </ul>
Equitable Workforce Development and Entrepreneurship	<p>Project portfolios or state or utility programs support community workforce development by advancing high wages, reducing income disparities across demographic lines, ensuring a trained and available workforce that is reflective of the community, and creating a safe working environment.</p>





	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Example:</b> The project portfolio developer hires and trains community members for related positions, such as in design, construction, or community engagement.</li> <li>• <b>Example:</b> The project portfolio developer puts in place practices to recruit, retain, and advance historically underrepresented and disadvantaged populations, including but not limited to partnering with community organizations, best value contracting, developing training pathways, and more.</li> </ul>
<i>Engagement Awards:</i> Community Participation	<p>Project portfolios or state or utility programs demonstrate innovative, replicable, inclusive, and authentic community engagement practices that enable community input to drive portfolio outcomes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Example:</b> The project portfolio developer partners with a local community organization to involve community members in the portfolio design, benefits structure, and siting.</li> </ul>
<i>Engagement Awards:</i> Inclusive Outreach	<p>Project portfolios or programs deliver successful communications campaigns that set and achieve ambitious goals to increase solar energy adoption or solar workforce recruitment and retention.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Example:</b> The project portfolio is located in a district that primarily speaks a different language, and outreach campaigns conducted in that language successfully subscribe that population.</li> <li>• <b>Example:</b> The project portfolio explains community solar in an innovative fashion that demonstrates its potential to subscribers.</li> </ul>

The above list of examples is not exhaustive. DOE encourages all project portfolios and state and utility programs that deliver unique and meaningful benefits to their subscribers and local communities to apply.

## B.1 Meaningful Benefits Details

There are many different models for community solar, including community solar projects or programs that are developed, owned, and administered by a utility; project portfolios that are developed and administered by private, third-party developers; projects that are led, owned, and managed directly by subscribers and community members; and others. States or utilities often set guidelines for how community solar projects are developed and how subscriptions are managed, and these guidelines may vary widely across jurisdictions and utility territories. Although business models and guidelines differ, consistency in the meaningful *benefits* provided by community solar subscriptions can build consumer trust and ensure that all U.S. households have the opportunity to meaningfully participate in the clean energy transition. Through the Sunny Awards, NCSP seeks to recognize community solar project portfolios and state and utility programs of all business models and in any jurisdiction that are able to provide the following meaningful benefits to subscribers and their communities:

**Low- to Moderate-Income (LMI) Household Access:** The cost of solar energy systems has dramatically over the past decade. As solar electricity has become more affordable, residential solar adoption has increased, with more than 3.3 million solar energy systems operating across the United States at the end of 2021. Despite decreases in system costs, many U.S. households still lack access to affordable solar electricity, especially renters, homeowners who can't access affordable financing, and those without suitable roof conditions or adequate sun exposure. Although rooftop solar adoption has become more



equitable relative to income over time, the finds that only 31% of solar adopters came from households that earned less than the area median income. In addition, census tracts with majority Black and Hispanic populations exhibit 30% and 69% less rooftop solar adoption, respectively, than the average census tract.

As of 2021, 65 MW<sub>AC</sub> of community solar capacity dedicated to serving LMI households was online, with more than 200 MW<sub>AC</sub> in project queues, representing just over 5% of the 5.2 GW<sub>AC</sub> of total installed community solar capacity. The [Justice40 initiative](#) directs 40% of the overall benefits of certain federal investments to flow to disadvantaged communities (DACs). Household income is one of 36 indicators used to determine whether a community is considered a DAC. As a pilot program of the Justice40 Initiative, NCSP is prioritizing, among other program benefits, the provision of at least 40% of new community solar capacity for LMI households.

(See [Key Terms](#) for guidance on how to define LMI households).

**Greater Household Savings:** Adopting community solar can lower household energy costs relative to overall household income, especially for those in frontline and disadvantaged communities. Low-income households spend 8.6% of their income on energy costs, three times more than non-low-income households. For families at or below 100% of the federal poverty level (FPL), the average ratio of energy expenditures to overall household income is 16%—nearly one-sixth of household income. Residents of counties with higher average energy expenditures have higher premature mortality rates, poorer health, and lower average life expectancies.

In responses to a [request for information \(RFI\) on equitable community solar](#) released in 2021, NCSP received feedback from stakeholders that at least a 20% reduction in electricity bill costs for community solar subscribers was necessary to have a meaningful impact on household energy expenditures and to provide benefits at parity with rooftop solar. This 20% bill savings level was used to determine NCSP's target to generate \$1 billion in cumulative electricity bill savings for the equivalent of 5 million households through community solar between 2021 and 2025.<sup>1</sup>

**Resilience and Grid Benefits:** A resilient power system, as defined by the DOE and the, must be capable of lessening the likelihood of long-duration electrical outages occurring over large service areas, limiting the scope and impact of outages when they do occur, and rapidly restoring power after an outage. As extreme weather events become more common and place undue stress on electricity infrastructure, solar and other distributed energy resources can help communities rapidly recover. During extreme weather, the lack of resilient infrastructure to deliver energy can cost human lives, as access to essential services is disrupted.

Community solar projects that are designed with resiliency and reliability in mind can be a decentralized source of energy for a community in the event of a grid outage or emergency. Community solar can enable communities to utilize solar plus storage or microgrids to prevent disruptions in power caused by extreme weather and other events, and to rapidly restore electricity to critical facilities or 'island' segments of the distribution network if the grid goes down. Community solar projects that incorporate virtual power plants or other demand response actions can reduce peak load demand, making the larger grid more resilient. Community solar that is sited strategically may also be able to provide technical grid benefits, including the ability to improve voltages at the end of the feeder, alleviate congestion, and reduce line losses. Community solar projects may offer supplementary resilience benefits when they are co-located with resilience hubs that provide additional services to support community development and



growth. Increasing equitable access to reliable sources of energy before, during, and after extreme events is a priority of NCSP.

**Community Ownership:** Community ownership allows community members, other individuals invested in supporting the community, or organizations that reflect the interests of those members, to have equity ownership rights in a community solar project or project portfolio. Ownership is one method to allow community members to determine how a community solar project is developed and how its benefits are distributed. The Institute for Local Self Reliance (ILSR) found that local ownership of a one-megawatt community solar project would provide nearly twice the cash flow to the local community as a third-party-owned lease model of the same size. This amounts to nearly \$5.7 million in net present value over the 25-year project life.<sup>3</sup> Additional benefits of community ownership can include local job creation, increased property values, and the retention of wealth within a community.

Where direct ownership of project assets is not possible or desirable, community solar may provide other wealth-building opportunities for subscribers and their communities through community benefit agreements or other innovative approaches to reinvest the monetary benefits of a community solar project back into the local community.

Community ownership has been identified as one strategy to increase energy democracy, which is one of [eight priorities](#) of DOE's Justice40 efforts. As a pilot program of the Justice40 Initiative, NCSP is prioritizing, among other program benefits, inclusion of community ownership and other community wealth-building in community solar projects and programs.

**Equitable Workforce Development and Entrepreneurship:** The grid transformation required to meet the nation's clean energy goals presents substantial workforce development opportunities. Distributed energy projects like community solar can support more local jobs than large-scale, centralized projects. Additionally, clean energy jobs often pay above-average wages, even for low-wage workers. Ensuring that clean energy jobs institute practices to recruit, retain, and advance historically underrepresented and disadvantaged populations is essential to an equitable transition to clean energy.

Despite this opportunity, most solar companies have difficulty filling workforce vacancies, often due to lack of experience, training, or technical knowledge in the applicant pool. To meet the nation's clean energy goal to decarbonize the electricity grid by 2035, the solar industry will need to grow by an estimated 500,000–1,500,000 jobs. Incorporating local workforce development in community solar projects or programs provides a unique opportunity to expose more people to careers in clean energy and contribute to growing local economies. Equitable and effective workforce development initiatives are industry-driven, employee-centric, and support diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. Workforce initiatives should support broad occupational training, leading to industry-recognized credentials and career-track employment. They should also provide pathways to jobs with family-sustaining wages and benefits, devoid of hostility and harassment, where workers are properly classified as employees, and have a free and fair choice to join, form, or assist a union.

**Engagement Awards: Innovation in Community Engagement:** Energy democracy—one of the eight principles of the Justice40 Initiative—is the principle that communities should have a say and agency in shaping and participating in their energy future. Inclusive and authentic community engagement includes practices in which community members define and drive the outcomes of the decision-making process to

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<sup>3</sup> Farrell, John. 2014. *Advantage Local: Why Local Energy Ownership Matters*. ILSR. [https://ilsr.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Advantage\\_Local-FINAL.pdf](https://ilsr.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Advantage_Local-FINAL.pdf).



ensure that project benefits accrue to the community. When community members are authentically engaged, project developers are accountable and responsive to community priorities and needs, and the outcomes of a program or project will clearly reflect the priorities of community members, potentially lowering customer acquisition and retention costs for the developer. Community solar projects and programs should include authentic community engagement with members of the community where the project will be constructed, or the program will serve to ensure that project outcomes and benefits reflect the priorities of community members.

**Engagement Awards: Innovation in Inclusive Outreach:** Transitioning to solar energy can help households across the country save money on their electricity bills, reduce their environmental impact, and improve resilience. Millions of Americans have experienced the benefits of solar, but many households have been left out either because of a lack of funds, low credit scores, or language barriers, or because their neighbors haven't gone solar—one of the biggest drivers of solar adoption.

Leading organizations have recognized these gaps in solar adoption and solar workforce recruitment and retention and are starting to target more diverse audiences in their solar energy communications campaigns. Effective, inclusive communication about solar energy and its benefits is crucial for solar to realize its full potential. Engaging communities directly, utilizing a variety of mediums, and telling stories that highlight customers that look like America are all communication strategies that can help expand solar adoption and solar careers in underrepresented communities. More best practices for successful inclusive outreach can be found in the [Best Practices Guide for Inclusive Solar Energy Communications](#).

**This is the end of the rules document. Thank you for reading.**





# Official Rules: The American-Made Sunny Awards for Equitable Community Solar

THESE RULES ARE EFFECTIVE APRIL 20, 2023