

February 3, 2023  
**Rhode Island Commerce Corporation**  
**REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS**

Solicitation Number: **RFP-2300**  
ADDENDUM NO. 1  
Questions & Answers

**REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS**  
**Solar Vendor for Affordable Solar Access Pathways Program (ASAP)**

The Rhode Island Commerce Corporation (Corporation) seeks proposals from a qualified firm or firms to provide solar leases and/or solar Power Purchase Agreements (“PPAs”) to low and moderate income (“LMI”) homeowners, i.e., households with income less than or equal to 80% of the Area Median Income in Rhode Island, in environmental justice focus areas as defined by the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (the “EJ Focus Areas”).

Question 1: What is the goal number of installations per year you hope to achieve with this program?

Answer: The Program Administrators do not have a target for number of homes that receive solar installations. We have the ability to potentially add more funds to this program, and we intentionally left out a target number of homes.

Question 2: What is the goal number of years you hope for this program to run?

Answer: The ASAP program will run until all of the funds are awarded.

Question 3: Will ASAP incentive recipient sites need to meet at least 80% TSRF? If so, that will disqualify 30-50% of low-income systems from qualifying for the incentive. We recommend making this incentive available to all low-income systems.

Answer: The current TSRF requirement for REF Grant program projects is 80%. Applications submitted under the ASAP program will need to meet this requirement in order to qualify for a grant. Program administrators will evaluate success of the program and can make changes to ensure that the program is meeting its goals.

Question 4: One of the preferred requirements for produce includes choices in contract structure: What does this mean?

Answer: Based on a Massachusetts program, the vendor offered different options such as a percentage discount on utility rate, and another vendor laid out a fixed electric rate with escalator. The program administrators will consider proposals that include multiple options.

Question 5: The RFP indicates that the customer contract should provide the customer with a net savings during the 1<sup>st</sup> year of the contract term – does that need to be

contracted? Or is that just a reasonable expectation based on the terms of the contract?

Answer: Program Administrators want to make sure that the customer understands that they are signing a 20-year contract and we would like to see the 20-year savings in writing.

Question 6: The RFP was not clear regarding participants – please clarify who can submit an application to the RFP?

Answer: The company that would be providing a contract to the customer should submit an application in response to this RFP. This could be a company that subcontracts work to a solar installation company but is ultimately responsible for signing the contract with the customer.

Question 7: Would Capital Good Fund, who works with Sungage and an installer, be eligible to apply for instance?

Answer: Yes, the Program Administrators are open to this type of applicant.

Question 8: Can you please explain eligibility requirements?

Answer: On page 16 of the RFP there is a list of eligibility requirements that we would accept regarding inclusion of customers.

Question 9: The 80% solar efficiency threshold seems overly “harsh,” please explain.

Answer: The 80% TSRF is a requirement for all projects submitted for REF PV Grants. This requirement ensures that grant funding goes to the best sites with the highest solar output.

Question 10: Is \$1M the total amount of funding for this program?

Answer: For now, the first round will be funded with one million dollars. The Program Administrators will consider adding additional funds based on how quickly we go through program funds in the first round.

Question 11: Will there be additional funds once the initial round is depleted?

Answer: Potentially. The ASAP program will undergo program evaluation after the first year and will determine, at that time, what the next steps will be.

Question 12: Is there a prevailing wage requirement for this project?

Answer: No

Question 13: Is this program designed for leasing or owning?

Answer: It is designed for third party ownership including Power Purchase Agreements and leases.

Question 14: Why?

Answer: The Program Administrators modeled this program after Connecticut's Solar For All Program. This program was successful in reaching LMI communities. It demonstrated success for this type of community, the initial financial modeling, specific to RI customer, average system size, financing costs, etc., it was determined that the program would not be feasible if an ownership model was included. Access to financing can be a barrier, time "poverty" and actual ownership can also prevent LMI community members from going solar.

Question 15: The Project requires financing entity and an installation component plus marketing. Do you evaluate/score proposals on how they can combine these three?

Answer: Technical proposal scoring will consider all of these aspects; however, a separate marketing proposal is not required. Demonstrated marketing experience in your response will also be considered.

Question 16: When "cost" is referred to in the RFP, are you referring to overall cost of the installation? Or the Cost per kW/kW hour to the customer?

Answer: On page 21 and 22 of the RFP you will find some details of what is expected in the cost proposal and proposed incentive level, approach to ITC sharing and approach to customer savings.

Question 17: TSRF seems unduly limiting and this community may feel left out. What additional approvals will be required?

Answer: Applicants will be asked to submit required grant documents for each project. The application portal will make applying more efficient for the winning bidder. To qualify, a project must meet the standards set forth in the REF Minimum Technical Requirements document, located here: [REF Min Tech Requirements](#).

Question 18: Customer income eligibility requirements: You must meet both requirements?

Answer: Yes, however this map is subject to change. We are working with energy justice program manager to refine this and working with selected vendor to define EJ areas.

Question 19: Regarding the ITC Adders in the cost proposal - between now and RFP due date, there is a possibility that we won't have clarification from the federal government. How should an applicant approach this and is there flexibility for the applicant on these issues?

Answer: Program administrators acknowledges that there is uncertainty in these requirements. We will work with the vendor or vendors and suggest that applicants include as much detail as they are comfortable with in their applications.

Question 20: Section 10 is vague - can you provide more clarity on intentions of this program - do you have an impact goal?

Answer: We do not have a target # of homes. We have ability to potentially add more funds to this program, and we intentionally left out a target number of homes.

Question 21: Is there an expected time frame for REF/OER to select a vendor?

Answer: A vendor will be selected after all RFP responses are received, reviewed and a winning bidder is approved by the Board of Directors at RI Commerce. We anticipate making this announcement in the Spring of 2023, but we don't have a specific date that this will be announced.

Question 22: What is the maximum number of households?

Answer: We do not have a target for number of homes that receive solar installations. We have the ability to potentially add more funds to this program, and we intentionally left out a target number of homes.

Question 23: Is the \$1M the first tranche of funding? OR is it the total? Will there be more money allocated here over some period of time?

Answer: For now, the 1<sup>st</sup> round will be funded with \$1M. Based on how quickly we go through program funds in the first round, program administrators will consider additional funds.

Question 24: Page 17, section 8.3 of the RFP states: "PV arrays must not be installed on any roof that is expected to be replaced within 10 years." Can we have a roof adder for these properties that may fall into this category?

Answer: There is no roof adder included in this program.

Question 25: Can ground mounts be installed if the system can't reach the required TSRF on the roof?

Answer: Ground mounted PV arrays are eligible under this program and must meet local, municipal set-back and land-use requirements.

Question 26: Is there a kW size limit for batteries? \_

Answer: The REF Grant program includes an Energy Storage Adder grant capped at \$2,000 for each qualifying project. The program does not limit the size of the energy storage system.

Question 27: Can projects in the state of RI be serviced by dealers who are outside state lines?

Answer: Yes, however companies providing installation services must meet the state requirements for installing solar including being registered with the RI Secretary of State, registered as a general contractor with the General Contractor's Registration Board, and have a licensed RI electrician perform the installation work.

Questions 28: Can you provide some clarity on which programs can serve as proxies for income verification.

Answer: See page 17 of the RFP regarding the income verification types that will be allowed.

Question 29: Can you provide some clarity on the extent to which this is part of an effort to build best practices and share knowledge regionally.

Answer: Some of the funding to support this program is coming from the US Department of Energy and they are very interested in program replicability and ways programs can be streamlined. Plans to meet DOE's replicability and knowledge sharing deliverables will be discussed with the selected vendor after award.

Question 30: What percentage of projects will be required to undergo the third-party inspection process called out in section 8.3?

Answer: The exact percentage of inspections that will be required have not yet been determined yet. The Program Team will work with the selected vendor to determine the exact percentage.

Question 31: Could you please provide a copy of the presentation that was given at the Bidders conference on January 19, 2023?

Answer: Questions and answers that are part of a bidders' conference will be recorded and posted in writing on Friday, February 3, 2023, to insure equal access.

Question 32: Could you please provide a list of the attendees to the Bidders conference to help facilitate mutually beneficial partnerships?

Answer: The Bidders conference was open to the public and attendees were not asked to submit their names or organizational affiliation prior to participation. Therefore, we cannot provide a comprehensive list of attendees for this event.

Question 33: Could you please provide the detailed URL/Website to which RFP related documents will be posted?

Answer: Responses to questions, interpretations, or clarifications concerning this RFP will be posted online via addendum at [www.commerceri.com](http://www.commerceri.com) and <https://www.ridop.ri.gov/>.

Question 34: Who will be the awarded proposers counterparty in the executed contract for this scope of work? 1) Renewable Energy Fund, a Division of the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation?; 2) Rhode Island Office of Energy Resources? 3) Both, jointly? 4) Other?

Answer: Contracts or agreements related to this RFP will be executed between RI Commerce and the winning bidder or bidders.

Question 35: Will you consider awarding this RFP to a solar lease provider financial entity? The lease provider / financial entity could be installer agnostic and qualify installers to work with. That would allow low-income homeowners to work with any approved installer that they want (as is the case with the REF grant incentives). That would increase the access for low-income homeowners and allow them to select their solar installer. Installers qualified by the financial entity who is awarded the RFP could then offer the ASAP incentive to their customers who meet the income requirements. This is the way that solar loans and leases are currently offered in the industry. A customer signs with any installer they choose and then the solar installer provides a solar loan or lease via a financial entity offering solar loans or leases (examples: green banks, mosaic, dividend solar). An installer agnostic incentive allows low-income homeowners to choose their solar installer and increases access to the program, like the REG grants.

Answer: The financing and marketing for the ASAP program will be managed by the chosen vendor(s). The vendor may subcontract to as many RI licensed solar companies as needed.

Question 36: What level of production guarantee is required by "Customer contracts for the Eligible Products must include production guarantees for the whole contract term?" The lease contract will likely be 20+ years to make the financials work. A real 20+ year production guarantee requires not replacing the roof, maintaining the same homeowner, eliminating nearby tree growth, preventing squirrel and critter attacks, preventing utility outages, and maintaining an active internet connection without changing the password for 20+ years. This requirement is impossible to provide and unnecessary if maintenance is provided for the term of the contract.

Answer: RI Commerce encourages bidders to submit a proposal they feel is something they can achieve. Production guarantees are a standard customer protection provision in the industry. For an example, bidders can refer to the Solar Energy Industries Association "Zero Down Residential Lease Contract" templates available here: <https://www.seia.org/research-resources/model-leases-and-ppas>.

Question 37: What kind and level of "solar system insurance for the whole term of the customer contract" is required? Solar insurance varies significantly in what it covers and most solar specific insurance plans are offered by non-bankable entities.

Answer: The interest of the state is to ensure that consumers, particularly low-income consumers, are adequately protected against events of damage and loss, with usual caveats for gross negligence and intentional misconduct. Bidders are free to propose what they think is the right level of protection for the state to evaluate as part of the proposal.

Question 38: What if as a partner, company would like to "give" this incentive to the homeowner?

Answer: The incentive will be paid to the winning bidder based on individual applications. The winning bidder will be free to pass on all or part of that incentive to the customer if it makes sense for them to do so. We encourage creativity.

Question 39: In the *Minimum Eligible Products Requirement* it states under #3 that "...and yield net savings during the contract term" while under the "Preferred Eligible Products Features" it lists contracted 1st-year savings. The inclusion of a 1st year savings guarantee in the *preferred features* suggests that the "net savings during the contract term" is referring to an expectation of savings but not necessarily contractually required (otherwise a first-year savings guarantee wouldn't be necessary in the *preferred features*), is that correct? We are trying to determine whether we must contractually guarantee savings for the entire 20-25 year term of the lease.

Answer: The winning bidder will not need to contractually guarantee savings for the entire 20-25 year term of the lease. As stated in the RFP, it is required for the winning bidder to offer contracted first-year savings. The winning bidder is not required to offer contracted net savings during the whole contract term due to the lack of control over consumer behavior and utility prices. However, it is expected that the winning bidder will structure its product so that the consumer can have a reasonable expectation of savings over the contract term. This will be evaluated as part of the Technical Proposal Criterion.

Question 40: Maximum number of households? Max of \$1million and price thresholds?

Answer: Please refer to questions # 10, 21 and 22.

Question 41: The power requirement per house as per the RFP is 25 KW solar PV. However, the capacity of BESS with storage hours is not mentioned. Will appreciate if you please provide the BESS capacity and storage hours as this will have bearing in the formulation of quotation /proposal.

Answer: The ASAP program will not place a limit on the size of energy storage systems if proposed. Applicants are not required to include energy storage in their RFP response.

Question 42: We would like to know on the Bid Fee. Bid Bond and Performance Security after PPA if any against the RFP.

Answer: There is no bid fee required to submit a proposal to this RFP.

Question 43: The mode of payment against the supply of energy is very important. The details on the mode of payment from individual beneficiary or any other terms against sale of monthly energy and guaranteed payment terms is required.

Answer: The mode of payment from the beneficiary and terms related to the sale of energy is determined by the vendor.

Question 44: We would like to further know whether the Elevated Incentives of \$ 1 million will be released upfront to individual contractor under PPA, in the event of more than one bidders are awarded the contract or the amount will be split.

Answer: The Elevated Incentive will be paid to the winning bidder based upon individual applications into a portal and after inspection (or self-inspection as the case may be). The incentive will not be released upfront to the winning bidder. In the unlikely event where RI Commerce selects more than one bidder, the incentives would be split following the number of installations on a first-come first-served basis.

Question 45: We would like to know is there any provision for advance payment along with signing of PPA? This will help the bidder better leverage the incentives for quoting complete price and having more benefits for the beneficiaries of the project.

Answer: The incentives will be paid after inspection. However, RI Commerce will remain flexible and open to suggestions during the contracting process.

Question 46: The warranty of PV panels is 30-35 years and the proposed PPA tenor is 10 years. Can the PPA tenor be enhanced to 30-35 years with PV panels and extended warranty of inverters, BESS and other accessories in the line of distributed energy and utility scale projects.

Answer: The vendor is responsible for determining the length (in years) of the PPA/lease agreement as well as the warranties.

Question 47: Timely payment against supply of clean energy is very important for the health of the project. Will appreciate to have more details on alternate remedial payment mechanism, in the event of payment default by individual houses.

Answer: While RI Commerce and RIOER will assist in the marketing of the program and facilitating financing, the state is not a party to the PPA/lease contracts to be signed with customers.

Question 48: There is possibility of spilt of the project target as one contractor may not be in a position to complete targeted installations. We would like to know about the target houses for each contractor in a year and in the 10 years.

Answer: The program administrators reserve the right to select more than one vendor. No installation targets have been set.

Question 49: The provision of make in America or local content in the project under the spirit of IRA is the area needs further clarification.

Answer: Under 26 U.S. Code § 48(a)(12)(B), “Rules similar to the rules of section 45(b)(9)(B) shall apply” to the domestic content bonus credit amount. 26 U.S. Code § 45(b)(9)(B) can be reviewed here:

[https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/26/45#b\\_9\\_B](https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/26/45#b_9_B)

Question 50: We would like to have some information on the likely requirement of permitting process.

Answer: Permits are reviewed and issued by the authorities who have jurisdiction within a particular municipality. Solar permit information can be found here:

<https://energy.ri.gov/renewable-energy/solar/rhode-island-solar-permit>

Question 51: The support of RIOER and REF for any loan Guarantee over and above the Elevated Incentives to help contractor to obtain commercial resources from the banks or investment firms will be very supportive to get better delivery of project value. Will the awarded contractors have that facility or RIOER and REF will support contractor to raise Green Bond to fund the project.

Answer: No.

Question 52: We would like to know about the provision of Liquidated damages if any in the contract, in the event of delayed commissioning.

Answer: The RFP does not include any requirements relevant to liquidated damages.

\*\*\*End of Addendum \*\*\*