

Request for Information: MASFA Education/Outreach Grants

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Request for Information Background and Summary

Massachusetts has received a \$156 million, five-year award from the Environmental Protection Agency (“EPA”) to launch the Massachusetts Solar for All (“MASFA”) program, which aims to expand access to clean and affordable solar energy for communities in Massachusetts. The MASFA Coalition, consisting of the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center, Department of Energy Resources, Massachusetts Community Climate Bank, and Boston Housing Authority, will utilize federal funds to develop and administer core residential solar PV initiatives. For more information on MASFA, please visit the website [here](#).

As part of this effort, along with direct financial assistance, MassCEC is funding a suite of supporting initiatives to ensure impact in Low-Income and Disadvantaged Communities (LIDACs) and help address non-financial barriers to solar access. These initiatives will include support focused on accessible and smooth program participation as well as support that can help all LIDAC residents, even those not utilizing program financial assistance, overcome barriers to solar access.

As one such initiative, MassCEC intends to offer a funding opportunity for campaigns that increase awareness of MASFA in communities, and direct eligible residents toward available financial assistance opportunities (“Education/Outreach Grants”, or the “Program”). These campaigns will amplify the impact of MASFA by funding and empowering organizations, trusted both locally and culturally, to build capacity and disseminate information about solar and MASFA opportunities in their communities.

MassCEC is developing a Request for Proposals (“RFP”) to solicit applications from interested community-based organizations (“CBOs”) and municipalities for Education/Outreach Grants. To assist in this development, MassCEC is requesting feedback from CBOs, municipalities, Tribal entities, and other stakeholders regarding the questions included below. Areas of feedback include applicant eligibility, eligible types of work, grant amounts, how these grants relate to other MASFA supporting initiatives, and grantee reporting requirements.

Who Should Respond

MassCEC welcomes comments from any CBO, municipality, or Tribal entity located in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, as well as any other entity with experience conducting clean energy outreach programs to communities, or other stakeholders to the deployment of distributed energy resources.

Purpose of Request for Information

MassCEC is seeking feedback through this Request for Information (“RFI”) that will help influence Program design and enable MassCEC to finalize Program materials and operational guidelines.

RFI Submittal Timeline

MassCEC asks for responses to this RFI to be submitted **no later than 5 p.m. ET on Tuesday 4/29/2025 via this survey**. If survey access is a challenge, MassCEC is also happy to accept feedback directly through email or a virtual meeting.

If submitting by email, responses must be sent to solar@masscec.com. “RFI Response – Education/Outreach Grants” should appear in the email subject line.

If you would like to share feedback verbally in a meeting, please reach out to solar@masscec.com and the team will coordinate with you to set up a conversation.

MassCEC may follow up to obtain additional feedback following review of the responses to this RFI.

Please note that MassCEC is subject to the Massachusetts Public Records Law. Any written responses to this RFI may be subject to public disclosure if requested. Please do not provide any confidential information in your written responses.

MassCEC appreciates your feedback to this RFI, and your assistance in developing a successful program.

Instructions for Respondents:

1. Answer as many questions as you can; it is possible that not all questions will apply to all respondents.
2. Do not include sensitive or confidential information as part of your response.

Please note: all proposed program language presented in this RFI is draft language and subject to change. Nothing in this RFI obligates MassCEC to release any specific solicitation language, or any solicitation at all.

Education/Outreach Grants RFI Questions

1. Eligible Applicants

The current proposed applicant eligibility for the Program is as follows:

“The following types of organizations are eligible to apply under this RFP:

- **Community-Based Organizations (“CBOs”):** Organizations and entities with a demonstrated history of engaging and supporting eligible communities, for example community action partnerships, neighborhood revitalization organizations, advocacy groups, affordable housing providers, affordable housing developers, and non-profits;
- **Federally Recognized and State-Acknowledged Tribes (“Tribes”):** Federally Recognized Tribes are defined by the US Department of the Interior Bureau of Indian Affairs as an American Indian or Alaska Native tribal entity that is recognized as having a government-to-government relationship with the United States, with the responsibilities, powers, limitations, and obligations attached to that designation, and is eligible for funding and services from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Massachusetts’ Commission on Indian Affairs (MCIA) assists Native American individuals, tribes, and organizations recognized by the state of Massachusetts in their relationship with state and local government agencies...; and
- **Municipalities** (including municipal lighting plant [“MLP”] communities)*.

Please note that **municipalities are not eligible as standalone applicants, and if applying as part of a team, **AT LEAST ONE** organization on the team must be a CBO or Tribe.*

Organizations looking to submit a proposal are encouraged to collaborate with other entities for campaigns (provided they are eligible as above). The MASFA team may consider the composition of Applicant teams in scoring, e.g. by assessing how impact may be maximized by:

- *Teams that include multiple CBOs and/or Tribes...; and*
- *Team proposals that include partners with a variety of expertise and/or cover a broader geographic range or range of communities.”*

- **How easy to understand are these guidelines?**

- **How could eligibility requirements be communicated more clearly?**
- **Should municipalities be eligible to apply on their own, or should funding require a CBO partner?**
- **Per federal contractual requirements, CBOs and municipalities must be eligible entities for these grants. What other partnership structures, parameters, or criteria could be included to encourage a range of innovative applicants or campaigns?**

2. Eligible Types of Work

The current proposed types of work that would be eligible to be funded as part of proposed campaigns is as follows:

“For this grant opportunity, Applicants must propose an education/outreach campaign that specifically aims to increase awareness of solar and MASFA financial opportunities among communities with large numbers of eligible participants. (Please see the [MASFA website](#) to learn more about these financial opportunities and eligibility criteria.) Applicants’ proposals must highlight the communities they will reach, outreach methods/approaches they have identified as being the most effective for engaging these communities, and how these approaches will be implemented.

The expectation is that these funds should be utilized within two (2) years. MassCEC anticipates these grants will be utilized for activities including, but not limited to:

- *Staff time for managing and/or conducting education/outreach programs;*
- *Costs associated with ongoing community engagement (provided all costs are within EPA eligible parameters); and*
- *Marketing activities and expenses commonly associated with outreach initiatives, such as purchasing marketing collateral, promotional mailers, and website or social media-related costs.*

MassCEC is open to education/outreach activities not listed above and encourages creativity in proposed approaches and methods.”

- **How clear are the parameters for eligible campaigns? What else could be included to help guide applicants during consideration and application?**
- **Do these guidelines provide enough flexibility to allow for creative or innovative proposals? How could they be amended to encourage innovative approaches?**
- **Are there certain costs or uses of funds which would be critical for maximizing the impact of these campaigns, and thus should be eligible (if allowable by EPA guidelines)?**

3. Award amounts

MassCEC anticipates making awards of between \$100k and 250k and welcomes proposals for campaigns at any amount in this range. MassCEC may award proposed campaigns at amounts lower than requested by the applicant, if the campaign could be executed and have a similar impact at a lower funding level. Similarly, MassCEC may consider requests for higher budgets relative to the scale of the proposed campaign and reach of communities the Applicant team is targeting.

- **How reasonable is this funding range for supporting these kinds of campaigns, given the eligible types of work and timeline?**
- **How would fiscal management and other grant management requirements (see “Reporting Requirements” and “Subaward Requirements” below) of these grants pose a burden to smaller organizations, or those with fewer staff, if selected? In what ways could any administrative burden be alleviated?**

4. Related/Overlapping MASFA Initiatives

The following language is drafted in the RFP regarding other MASFA program components that may relate to selected campaigns:

“Applicants should note that under MASFA programming, MassCEC will be procuring a range of complementary services, outlined below. Where feasible, Applicants should avoid duplication of these services in proposals, and are welcome to apply to multiple concurrent MASFA procurements, if their skillsets align with each solicitation.

- Educational Materials:*** *This provider will develop educational, informational, and training resources pertinent to MASFA programming for use to facilitate greater accessibility of MASFA programming for Massachusetts residents. Materials created by the educational materials provider will be made available to applicants funded under this RFP for use in their education/outreach campaigns. Applicants are still welcome to develop their own materials that are culturally/linguistically tailored to the communities they are trying to reach, but are asked to keep in mind that promotional materials on all MASFA offerings are available to them and were created specifically for reaching those eligible for assistance under this program. Thus, we ask applicants to not duplicate efforts with these materials and budget accordingly. The materials developed by our provider that are available for use will be uploaded on the MASFA website*.*
- Decision Support:*** *This provider will support residents of small residential buildings who are interested in financial assistance offered under MASFA. This provider will:*

1. *Help residents understand and navigate eligibility for MASFA initiatives;*
2. *Help residents navigate the suite of MASFA financial assistance initiatives and choose appropriate pathways to meet their needs;*
3. *Provide guidance on available federal and state tax credits and incentives, including how to access them, when applicable;*
4. *Help residents understand applicability, sequencing, and costs/benefits of stacking complementary residential decarbonization programs (e.g. MASFA enabling home upgrade grants, [MCCB Energy Saver Home Loan](#), [Mass Save HEAT Loan](#), etc.).*

- c. **Technical assistance providers for 1) both affordable multifamily offerings and 2) community owned community solar offerings:** *Providers who can similarly help interested parties with navigating eligibility and getting involved with the programs.*

Given the availability of the decision support, educational materials, and technical assistance providers, we ask that Applicants focus their proposed campaigns around initial outreach and information sharing and refrain from proposing direct support to residents with navigating MASFA eligibility and engagement. We encourage Applicants to account for these support resources in their proposal design accordingly to create a smooth experience for residents who decide to proceed with the program, e.g. by distributing materials created by the Educational Materials provider in a language widely spoken in the target community, or proposing connecting interested community members with the appropriate provider as a next step after initial outreach. Learn more about these supporting resources [here](#).”*

*Please note: further information is not yet publicly available for these supporting initiatives at the time of drafting this RFI, but is expected to be [published on the MASFA website](#) by the launch of this RFP; information for the Educational Materials and Decision Support providers may also go live while this RFI is open for comment. Once launched, the RFP will direct to the relevant webpages for each supporting initiative to provide further context for applicants.

- **How clearly are the related program components outlined? Are the distinctions between these other initiatives and the Education/Outreach Grants clear and well-defined?**
- **How can MassCEC ensure that recipients of Education/Outreach Grants are prepared to collaborate with these providers and able to communicate with them?**

5. Subaward Requirements

As these grants are federally funded, there are certain requirements that will be placed on grantees as part of the MASFA Coalition's contractual requirements with the EPA. These requirements are necessary by nature of these grants being classified as "subawards" under MASFA, per EPA's funding policies (you can learn more about the EPA's subaward policy [here](#)). The MassCEC team will be available throughout contracting and implementation of these projects to support awardees in navigating these requirements.

- **How can MassCEC best support grantees, particularly smaller or less-resourced organizations, in managing the requirements of receiving a subaward in addition to campaign delivery?**

6. Reporting Requirements

The following language is drafted in the RFP to note how reporting requirements will be set for awardees:

"Awardees under this RFP, as part of their contractual terms with MASFA, will be required to do periodic reporting in order to document progress made over time and key learnings identified through their campaigns. These written reports will likely be due on a quarterly basis, and further guidance on the specific content/timing of the reports will be developed as part of contracting with each awardee; awardees will also have the opportunity to propose tentative metrics for tracking campaign progress in the application form. There will also be components of these reports required from all awardees to ensure proper reporting and compliance with the EPA's Terms & Conditions. We encourage applicants to account for reporting in their budgets (e.g. ensuring staff time includes this work)."

- **How helpful is this language for understanding reporting requirements for selected campaigns?**
- **What other details, or more specific parameters on reporting requirements, could be included here to help applicants understand potential obligations?**

7. Misc.

- **Following grantee selection, what support mechanisms or programmatic elements would be helpful for grantees as they deploy their campaigns? (E.g. calls with other awardees to discuss progress, office hours with the MASFA team, etc.)**

- **If you have any additional comments or recommendations on the Education/Outreach Grants program design, please outline them here.**