

Frequently Asked Questions Solar Energy Innovation Network (SEIN) Innovation at SCALE

Q: What is “Innovation at SCALE”?

- A: [The National Renewable Energy Laboratory](#) (NREL) is offering targeted technical and analytical assistance to help communities and organizations across the country adopt and apply insights developed through the [Solar Energy Innovation Network](#) (SEIN). SCALE stands for Solar Community Assistance for Solar Equity. One of the objectives of SEIN is to enable communities facing similar solar adoption challenges to learn about and employ the solutions generated through the SEIN program. Innovation at SCALE participants will leverage the SEIN teams’ insights, products, processes, strategies, or tools to inform their own approaches to meeting their current goals.

Q: Who can be an Innovation at SCALE participant?

- A: Assistance with equitable solar adoption through applying lessons learned from SEIN is open to all U.S.-based stakeholders, including but not limited to government entities, regulatory authorities, utilities, project developers, and community organizations. Individual organizations and teams of stakeholders are eligible for support.

Q: Which past SEIN projects match my organization’s goals?

- A: Currently, we are providing assistance for participants interested in *equitable solar adoption for residential or commercial-scale projects*, similar topics to those addressed by the SEIN Round 3 teams. More information on the Round 3 teams can be found on [the SEIN Round 3 webpage](#). Some examples of projects and topics from the SEIN Round 3 teams are provided in the following table.

SEIN Round 3 Project	Project Description	Best for Participants With Goals Related to:
Project Led by RE-volv	This team aims to increase solar adoption by houses of worship led by Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) by strengthening existing partnerships and scaling up successful efforts. The team streamlined the solar project pipeline of identifying promising locations, presenting proposals, financing projects, and highlighting successes.	Serving houses of worship, BIPOC-led organizations, alternative financing, national networks
Team in Salt Lake City, UT	This team worked to increase the uptake of commercial solar and storage in underserved communities by engaging community and business stakeholders, hosting community listening sessions, and developing culturally relevant outreach tools and resources that address solar market barriers and economically entrenched energy injustices.	Commercial solar development, community building and engagement, cultural competency, outreach
Team in Port Arthur, TX	This project team aims to address the lack of knowledge, affordability, and capital barriers to equitable commercial-scale solar as they relate to solar-plus-storage microgrids that build community wealth in underserved neighborhoods of Port Arthur, Texas.	Solar-plus-storage microgrids, wealth-building, fossil fuel dependent communities



<p>Team in the Twin Cities, MN</p>	<p>This team engaged minority-owned businesses in underserved neighborhoods to increase solar deployment. The team collaborated to apply human-centered design to understand stakeholders' lived experiences, gain insights, and challenge assumptions. The team is cocreating solutions to reduce inequities in solar adoption, increase business resilience, and build capacity and leadership to sustain ongoing community action.</p>	<p>Serving minority-owned businesses, human-centered design, business resilience and development</p>
<p>Team in Tallahassee, FL</p>	<p>This team worked to unlock the market potential for solar photovoltaics (PV) in low- to moderate-income (LMI) neighborhoods by evaluating technical potential, economic feasibility, and financial tools and programs. The project aims to provide a pathway to install solar at a neighborhood scale that can be replicated in other LMI neighborhoods through awareness of solar benefits in underserved communities and business awareness of LMI funding opportunities.</p>	<p>Unlocking market potential in underserved communities, exploring financing and economic factors, replicable pathways for installation in LMI communities</p>
<p>Team in the Portland, OR, Metro Area</p>	<p>The team aims to address solar deployment barriers and disproportionately low solar awareness in BIPOC communities of Portland, Gresham, Beaverton, Hillsboro, and Tigard, Oregon. The team worked to identify pathways for installing solar on BIPOC homes through innovative incentives for solar-related energy retrofits and home upgrades. The team also built a network of BIPOC "Solar Ambassadors" to educate and build capacity in their respective communities.</p>	<p>Solar-related energy retrofits and home upgrades, solar ambassador programs, peer learning, engaging BIPOC communities</p>
<p>Other Topics Based on Research Conducted in This Round</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Implementing Energy Efficiency Upgrades and Solar PV Adoption for Small Businesses in Disadvantaged Communities - Understanding Gentrification Pressures in Communities Adopting Rooftop Solar - Consumer Protection from Predatory Practices in Residential Solar PV Adoption - Community Engagement Through Peer Learning for More Equitable Solar Adoption 	<p>Addressing barriers for small commercial buildings interested in solar adoption, gentrification pressures, consumer protection, strategies and best practices for community engagement in the energy sector, peer-to-peer networks, case studies</p>

Q: What does “equitable solar deployment” refer to?

- A: Equitable solar deployment is an intentional focus on historically underserved communities who have disproportionately less opportunity or access to solar PV technology. To date, solar energy deployment has skewed toward certain communities and demographics. For example, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory found that the median income of households that adopt

solar is significantly higher than that of the average U.S. household.¹ Research published in *Nature Sustainability* found that Black- and Hispanic-majority census tracts have installed significantly less rooftop solar than other tracts.² These underserved communities may face barriers to solar photovoltaic (PV) adoption that differ from communities in which solar energy is already common. Each community will have differing priorities that lead them to value solar's various benefits differently. In SEIN Round 3, underserved communities across the country are confronting the solar barriers they face and unlocking the solar benefits most relevant to their own contexts. Similarly, the needs of SEIN Innovation at SCALE participants will be specific to their own contexts.

Q: None of those projects align exactly with my organization’s current goals. Is assistance flexible?

- A: If your current goals or requests for assistance do not exactly meet the current topic areas that we are offering assistance for, **we are flexible!** As long as your goals relate broadly to equitable solar deployment within a residential or commercial context, we are likely able to work with you to scope assistance that aligns with your organization’s goals. If your current goals are not at all related to these topic areas (i.e., transportation, more general electrification, etc.), then we may not be able to provide assistance at this time; however, please consider [subscribing to the Innovation Network mailing list](#) to learn when new topics are announced or exploring NREL’s other no-cost assistance opportunities like the [Clean Energy to Communities Expert Match Program](#).

Q: What type of work can this assistance be used for?

This assistance can be used for:	This assistance CANNOT be used for:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Short-term, targeted assistance for gaps in technical needs - Techno-economic decision support (using tools like NREL’s REopt®) - Consultation with NREL subject matter experts - Project design scoping for a future request for proposal - Engineering support - Flexible assistance based on the participant's current goals and priorities related to NREL’s expertise on the selected topic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Long-term assistance over the life cycle of a project - Formal project development or funding for a solar, storage, or microgrid system - Wages for staff - Grant writing services

Q: What does the process for assistance look like, including the timeline?

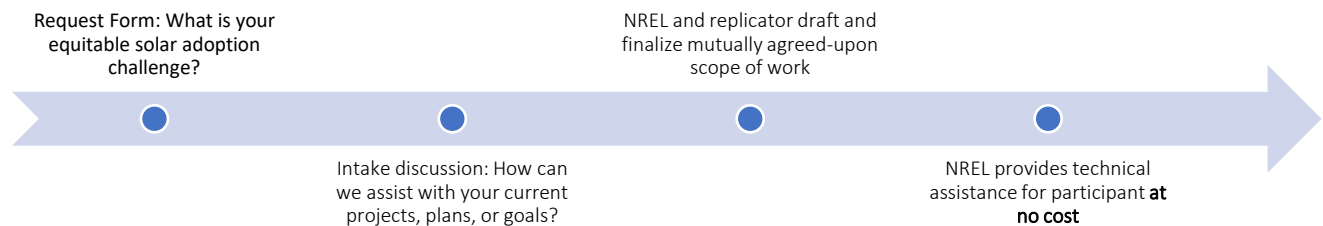
- A: We estimate that the process will take 3–6 months from start to finish.
 1. **Complete a Request Form** – Complete [this brief request form](#) about your current challenges with solar adoption and goals for working with SEIN Innovation at SCALE.

¹ Barbose, Galen, Sydney Forrester, Eric O’Shaughnessy, and Naïm Darghouth. 2022. “Residential Solar-Adopter Income and Demographic Trends: 2022 Update.” Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. https://eta-publications.lbl.gov/sites/default/files/solar-adopter_income_trends_final_0.pdf.

² Sunter, Deborah, Sergio Castellanos, and Daniel Kammen. 2019. “Disparities in rooftop photovoltaics deployment in the United States by race and ethnicity.” *Nature Sustainability* 2: 71–76. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-018-0204-z>.



2. **Intake Discussion** – After a request form is submitted, the SEIN Innovation at SCALE team will schedule a virtual 1-hour intake discussion where we will discuss the organization’s current projects, plans, and goals and how NREL’s capabilities and tools may align.
3. **Develop Assistance Plan** – From there, we will discuss the proposal internally to bring in the correct technical experts and draft an Assistance Plan with up to 100 hours of NREL staff time. Additional follow-up meetings with the participant may be necessary to further define the Assistance Plan. This process may take 2–4 weeks. After NREL drafts the Assistance Plan, the participants will have a chance to review the Assistance Plan, provide feedback, and confirm that this Assistance Plan meets their goals.
4. **Deliver Assistance** – Once both NREL and the participant agree on an Assistance Plan, the NREL team will begin the assistance, communicating regularly with the participant and delivering on the agreed-upon tasks. The assistance may be up to 100 hours of NREL staff time, so depending on the Assistance Plan, this process may take 2–5 months. After the final deliverable, the NREL team will ask for the organization’s participation in a voluntary final survey to provide feedback on their experience.



Q: How much does the assistance cost?

- A: This assistance is being offered at **no cost**. SEIN provides funding to NREL staff to execute the scope of work decided on by the NREL team and the participant team at no cost to the participant.

Q: When is the deadline to apply?

- A: There will be several phases of assistance. During each application period, please submit a request form. The SEIN team will review and accept requests after each deadline. Check out the [Innovation at SCALE webpage](#) for the current phase deadline.

Q: What is required from the participant?

- There is no requirement other than participation in scoping meetings, agreed-upon task deliverables, and other mutually agreed-upon conversations. If the confirmed scope of work includes analysis that requires additional data, then there may be a need for the participant to provide organizational data; however, this would not be a requirement unless it was requested and approved by the applicant.

Q: What is NREL’s goal for this?

- A: NREL is interested in addressing barriers to equitable solar deployment. This effort allows NREL to share tools, lessons learned, and frameworks that have been successfully developed through SEIN with other interested organizations who might benefit from this work.



Q: How do I apply for assistance through SEIN Innovation at SCALE?

- A: Fill out a request form during the application period, which takes about 10 minutes to complete. Please describe your organization's goals, what type of assistance you are looking for, and how participating in this program would support your organization. You can find the application [on the Innovation at SCALE webpage](#).

Q: If I receive assistance through SEIN Innovation at SCALE, am I eligible to also submit a proposal for SEIN Round 4 project team funding?

- A: Yes! Participating in SEIN Innovation at SCALE will not be a consideration for SEIN Round 4 applications. Round 4 awards are determined through a competitive selection process, and participating in SEIN Innovation at SCALE is not designed or intended to provide any advantage or disadvantage to Round 4 applicants.

Q: Can I use resources or analyses provided through SEIN Innovation at SCALE in my proposal for SEIN Round 4 project team funding?

- A: Yes! However, as stated, participating in SEIN Innovation at SCALE will not provide an advantage in the competitive selection process. Resources and analyses provided to a participant will need to be supported by a strong application describing how those resources and analyses complement the other components of the application.

Q: How do I get in contact with the SEIN team to ask additional questions?

- A: Please reach out to us with any questions at SEIN@nrel.gov.