

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

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Community Benefits and Engagement FAQs

What are the benefits of solar power?

Solar power's many financial, environmental, health, and societal benefits include reduced environmental impact of energy use, making the electrical grid more efficient and resilient, long-term cost savings and budget predictability for hosts, and improvements to local air quality. Download our one-page brief on the benefits of solar power [here](#).

Why Solar for the Richmond region?

Select donors to The Community Foundation for a greater Richmond have established this dedicated fund in order to advance clean energy resources in the Richmond region, educate students and other residents about solar power, obtain the public health benefits from reduced emissions regionally, and expand local job creation in one of the world's fastest growing industries.

Why the partnership among The Community Foundation, Secure Futures, Generation 180, the Richmond Region Energy Alliance, and the National Energy Education Development Project?

This innovative partnership of local and national non-profits with a certified B Corp company is designed to overcome the typical obstacles that prevent local governments, school districts, and non-profit organizations from deploying solar on site. The PPA provides the solar energy without any installation or maintenance costs to these public or non-profit entities, who then can use the grant awards to offset administrative costs incurred in executing the agreement, to implement educational programs, or to support other sustainability initiatives. The initiative leverages a remarkable \$12 million in private investment and brings more clean solar power to highly visible locations in the Richmond region.

How do I summarize the project in one paragraph?

The Community Foundation for a greater Richmond is seeking grant applications from local governments, K-12 public school systems, or non-profit organizations in the greater Richmond region that want to go solar on site. Grant awardees will enter into a power-purchase agreement (PPA) with the foundation's partner, Secure Futures, a Virginia solar developer and Certified B Corp. The PPA enables the local government, public school facilities, or non-profit entities to purchase solar energy with \$0 capital cost, no maintenance obligations, and equipment performance guarantees by inviting Secure Futures to build, maintain, and operate solar energy arrays at public facilities. Grant recipients will receive up to \$100,000 to support administrative costs, staff and teacher training, or other sustainability initiatives. Ultimately, the fund will leverage approximately \$12 million in private investment to catalyze five megawatts of generation (~15,000 solar panels) on public or non-profit sites. Interested entities must submit a non-binding Notice of Interest on-line by January 15, 2019 to begin the application process. See www.rvasolarfund.org for complete details and to apply.

Process Details for this Grant FAQs

What is the RVA Solar Fund?

The RVA Solar Fund is a dedicated, donor-led fund managed by the Community Foundation for a greater Richmond providing grants to local governments, K-12 public school districts, or non-profit organizations that enter into a solar power purchase agreement with Secure Futures.

Who is eligible to receive grant funding?

Public-school systems, local governments, and 501(c)(3) charitable organizations in the Richmond area are invited to apply for the RVA Solar Fund. The Community Foundation's service area includes the cities of Colonial Heights, Hopewell, Petersburg, and Richmond as well as the counties of Chesterfield, Goochland, Hanover, Henrico, and Powhatan. Public agencies from the nearby counties of Amelia, Charles City, Cumberland, Dinwiddie, Essex, Gloucester, King and Queen, King William, Lancaster, Mathews, Middlesex, New Kent, Northumberland, Prince George, Richmond, and Westmoreland also are eligible.

How may grantees spend grant funds?

Grant funds may be used for

- administrative costs associated with applying for the grant and executing the PPA;
- energy audits and other energy improvements on site;
- roof repairs and other maintenance or improvements specifically needed to enable solar installations;
- community education materials (signage, monitoring hardware and software, associated training, website development and hosting, events);
- instructor training in solar power systems; and/or
- curriculum and other classroom materials and training.

Grant funds may not be used for general expenses. The grant funds do not pay for solar panels; solar energy from the panels is provided to the grantee as part of the PPA with Secure Futures.

What are the grant amounts to be awarded?

Multiple grants ranging from \$4,000 to \$100,000 may be awarded. Individual grant amounts will depend on the merits of the proposal and the amount of solar energy to be generated at the applicant's site(s).

Qualified applicants should provide an estimated square footage of their **solar-ready** rooftops (unshaded and in good condition) or adjacent open land in their Notice of Interest.

Applicants seeking the maximum grant amount should identify solar ready area of 400,000 square feet (rooftop, land, or a combination thereof).

What are the on-site requirements for grantees?

The on-site requirements relate to the facility's energy demand and the space available for solar panels.

- Total electricity use by a grantee must be greater than 150,000 kWh or \$15,000 annually, based on metered use at proposed solar installation sites.
- Total space made available by an applicant must not be less than 10,000 square feet. Applicants are encouraged to aggregate space available across multiple sites (e.g. among several schools in the district).
- The minimum space available for solar panels *at one site* must not be less than 5,000 square feet of rooftop or 3 acres of open space.
- Rooftops identified for panels must be "solar-ready": unshaded, relatively free of obstructions, and in good condition.
- Open space identified for panels must be unshaded and located within 1,000 feet of a metered building with not less than 500,000 kWh annual usage.

- Applicants seeking the maximum grant amount should identify solar-ready area of a minimum 400,000 square feet, 15 acres of open land, or an equivalent combination of rooftop and land meeting the specifications noted above.

Does submitting a Notice of Interest (NOI) commit organizations in any way?

No. The NOI (due by January 15, 2019) is just a first step to express interest and explore feasibility. It does not commit the applicant to any further action or expense. Organizations submitting an NOI will receive an initial technical screening. Those that present promising technical and economic qualities will be offered a comprehensive solar feasibility study for \$100. That fee is merely an expression of institutional engagement and is refundable if the study does not demonstrate potential economic savings for the applicant.

Who can submit an NOI for a potential grantee?

Any authorized person can submit the NOI. It doesn't have to come from a top administrator or elected official. Submitting the NOI is just the first step needed to create the opportunity for winning a grant.

How can a prospective grantee know if they are a good candidate for solar?

Don't worry if you are unsure if your sites are good candidates, Secure Futures technical staff will review each NOI submission. Within three weeks of submitting an NOI, potential grantees will be notified if they are good candidates for obtaining a solar feasibility study.

What information and documentation is required for a successful application?

The total documentation applicants will provide through the entire process includes

- identification of points of contact and organizational leadership,
- identification of building addresses,
- electric bills for all candidate buildings,
- roof warranties for all candidate buildings,
- blueprints and construction documents for all candidate building roofs,
- authorization of detailed electric utility data,
- a non-disclosure agreement,
- legal counsel's approval of using the cooperative purchasing option (for public entities), and
- approval by the applicant's governing board and legal counsel of the template for Secure Futures' solar power purchase agreement.

What are the details of the Solar Feasibility Study (SFS)?

Potential grantees will obtain a feasibility study as part of the full process. Secure Futures will provide an SFS for \$100 per prospective grantee. The SFS evaluates the technical and financial viability of potential solar installations. If Secure Futures cannot show an economic benefit to the prospective grantee, the full \$100 will be refunded.

The SFA fee paid to Secure Futures is refundable if the economic analysis or structural review determine that the location is unfavorable for a solar array. If a prospective grantee goes forward with a PPA, the fee amount will be credited towards the first year's PPA energy payment, which is payable after the solar project is installed and placed into service. The SFS fee does not cover the full costs of the service but is considered a good faith deposit by prospective grantees to demonstrate their seriousness.

On what basis are final grants awarded?

The Community Foundation's RVA Solar Fund Donor Advisory Committee will select final grantees and determine award amounts based on the overall merits of each application, including technical feasibility and positive community impact.

When will grant winners receive the funds?

Half of each grant amount will be paid when the awardee is notified of the successful application (June 30, 2019). The balance will be paid once the solar arrays are operational.

When will the solar equipment be installed?

Installation of the solar arrays will begin in the winter of 2019-20. Construction will be complete by the third quarter of 2020.

Is any other support provided for grant winners?

Yes. In addition to cash awards, grantees will receive at no charge,

- solar safety training for maintenance/facilities staff,
- real-time energy monitoring and reporting data on the solar arrays' performance via an on-line portal, and
- (for schools and educational institutions) curriculum and teacher training workshops provided by the National Energy Education Development Project (NEED).

What if there are more qualified applicants than funding available?

Working with the Donor Advisory Committee, The Community Foundation may establish a wait list and continue fundraising to support additional grant awards.

About Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) FAQs

What is a PPA?

A PPA is an arrangement wherein the host customer only pays for the electrical output of the solar array (panels). The array is owned and maintained by Secure Futures. Secure Futures guarantees the performance of the system and only charges the customer for the electricity generated by the equipment. For more information on PPAs, see www.seia.org/research-resources/solar-power-purchase-agreements.

What are the key terms of the PPAs for this grant?

For this grant, the PPA will be a 20-year contract accompanied by a 20-year site lease of the roof or the ground on which the panels are installed. Each PPA also comes with an early purchase option which allows the on-site host to directly purchase the solar array after only six years if they so choose.

To save time and expense, public agencies seeking grants should use the cooperative purchasing agreement established by Albemarle County's July 2014 RFP for a solar PPA, which has been used by Lexington City Schools, Richmond Public Schools, and Augusta County Public Schools.

At the end of the 20-year contract, the customer may choose one of three options:

- purchase the solar array at fair market value;
- have Secure Futures remove the array at no cost to the customer; or
- extend the PPA with Secure Futures on a year to year basis.

How is a PPA finalized?

Upon receipt of all necessary technical and contractual documents and information, the PPA contract is prepared by Secure Futures and offered to the applicant.