

Workforce Development Strategies Supporting the Solar Industry

DATE: May 4, 2021
SUBJECT: Request for Information (RFI)

Description

This request for information is intended to inform the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Solar Energy Technologies Office (SETO) on workforce development programs, strategies, and tools to support the development of a diverse and skilled clean energy workforce. DOE is re-envisioning its approach to supporting vocational-based career opportunities holistically across clean energy technologies. This RFI is targeted at the solar industry and training providers to better understand how SETO can support an industry-driven, employee-centered approach to the clean energy workforce of the future.

Background

Over the past ten years, SETO and other offices in the Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE) have funded a wide variety of workforce development programs and tools to support the clean energy industry. Historical information about workforce programs supported by SETO can be found here: <https://www.energy.gov/eere/solar/solar-workforce-development>.

Purpose

The purpose of this RFI is to solicit feedback from industry, academia, government agencies, worker organizations (to include unions) and other stakeholders on issues related to the employment needs of the solar industry, and the perceived value of different workforce development programs, training strategies, and tools. SETO is specifically interested in information it could use to help promote an employee-centered diverse and inclusive workforce that includes possible pathways to union membership and engagement. SETO is interested in the views of solar developers at all scales, from small residential rooftop businesses to larger utility-scale developers, as well as companies involved in solar component manufacturing, and other solar-supporting industries. This RFI is focused on the solar industry and is part of a holistic approach across DOE to create the clean energy workforce of the future.

This is a Request for Information (RFI) only. EERE will not pay for information provided under this RFI and no project will be supported as a result of this RFI. This RFI is not accepting applications for financial assistance or financial incentives. EERE may or may not issue a Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) based on consideration of the input received from this RFI.

This is solely a request for information and not a funding opportunity announcement (FOA). SETO is not accepting applications.

Disclaimer and Important Notes

This RFI is not a FOA; therefore, EERE is not accepting applications at this time. EERE may issue a FOA in the future based on or related to the content and responses to this RFI; however, EERE may also elect not to issue a FOA. There is no guarantee that a FOA will be issued as a result of this RFI. Responding to this RFI does not provide any advantage or disadvantage to potential applicants if EERE chooses to issue a FOA regarding the subject matter. Final details, including the anticipated award size, quantity, and timing of EERE funded awards, will be subject to Congressional appropriations and direction.

Any information obtained as a result of this RFI is intended to be used by the Government on a non-attribution basis for planning and strategy development; this RFI does not constitute a formal solicitation for proposals or abstracts. Your response to this notice will be treated as information only. EERE will review and consider all responses in its formulation of program strategies for the identified materials of interest that are the subject of this request. EERE will not provide reimbursement for costs incurred in responding to this RFI. Respondents are advised that EERE is under no obligation to acknowledge receipt of the information received or provide feedback to respondents with respect to any information submitted under this RFI. Responses to this RFI do not bind EERE to any further actions related to this topic.

Confidential Business Information

Pursuant to 10 CFR 1004.11, any person submitting information that he or she believes to be confidential and exempt by law from public disclosure should submit via email, postal mail, or hand delivery two well-marked copies: one copy of the document marked “confidential” including all the information believed to be confidential, and one copy of the document marked “non-confidential” with the information believed to be confidential deleted. Submit these documents via email or on a CD, if feasible. DOE will make its own determination about the confidential status of the information and treat it according to its determination.

Evaluation and Administration by Federal and Non-Federal Personnel

Federal employees are subject to the non-disclosure requirements of a criminal statute, the Trade Secrets Act, 18 USC 1905. The Government may seek the advice of qualified non-Federal personnel. The Government may also use non-Federal personnel to conduct routine, nondiscretionary administrative activities. The respondents, by submitting their response, consent to EERE providing their response to non-Federal parties. Non-Federal parties given access to responses must be subject to an appropriate obligation of confidentiality prior to

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being given the access. Submissions may be reviewed by support contractors and private consultants.

Request for Information Categories and Questions

Category 1: Workforce Needs for the Solar Industry (For Solar Companies)

1. What job categories in the solar industry are the most in-demand (i.e., the types of jobs you hire most frequently)? What job categories are the hardest to find qualified candidates for (i.e., the types of jobs most difficult to fill)?
 - a. What are the qualifications – educational background, experience, training, skills, and/or certifications – necessary to fill these positions?
2. Has your company developed a diversity, equity, and inclusion strategy and/or taken steps to hire and promote people from groups currently underrepresented in the workforce? Is there any support DOE could provide that would encourage your company to take those steps?
3. Does your company employ labor-union-affiliated workers? Why or why not?

Category 2: Workforce Development Strategies Supporting the Solar Industry (For All Stakeholders)

4. What do you believe would be the most effective use of DOE funding in supporting the clean energy workforce? What do you believe would be the most effective use of DOE funding intended to promote diversity and inclusion within the clean energy workforce?
5. What training strategies do you believe are most effective: online learning, classroom and lab instruction, on-the-job training, hybrid models, etc.? Are there training models that you believe the DOE should fund?
6. Do you believe DOE support for curriculum standardization, certifications, career mapping platforms, which outline different career pathways in the clean energy industry, and/or other types of research and tools would be an effective use of government funding?

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7. Do you believe DOE support for virtual reality or artificial intelligence in learning programs would be an effective use of government funding?
8. How could DOE funding be used to support continued education, job placement, and wrap-around needs of the clean energy workforce and ensure that workers have pathways for growth, and well-paying careers, within the solar and other clean energy industries?

Request for Information Response Guidelines

Responses to this RFI must be submitted electronically to solarworkforce@ee.doe.gov no later than 5:00 p.m. ET on June 1, 2021. Responses must be provided as attachments to an email. It is recommended that attachments with file sizes exceeding 25MB be compressed (i.e., zipped) to ensure message delivery. Responses must be provided as a Microsoft Word (.docx) attachment to the email, and no more than 5 pages in length, 12 point font, 1 inch margins. Only electronic responses will be accepted.

Please identify your answers by responding to a specific question or topic if applicable. Respondents may answer as many or as few questions as they wish.

EERE will not respond to individual submissions or publish publicly a compendium of responses. A response to this RFI will not be viewed as a binding commitment to develop or pursue the project or ideas discussed.

Respondents are requested to provide the following information at the start of their response to this RFI:

- Company / institution name;
- Company / institution contact;
- Contact's address, phone number, and e-mail address.

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