



SOLAR ENERGY INNOVATION NETWORK

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 approach to meet 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 similar topics to those covered by SEIN Round 3 teams, focused on *equitable solar adoption for residential and commercial-scale projects*. Innovation at SCALE also supports selected topics from previous rounds of SEIN projects. More information on SEIN project teams can be found [here](#).

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

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. [10.1038/s41893-018-0204-z](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-018-0204-z).

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. Through SEIN, 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 SEIN 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 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 (e.g. transportation, heat pumps, distributed wind, 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 please explore 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?

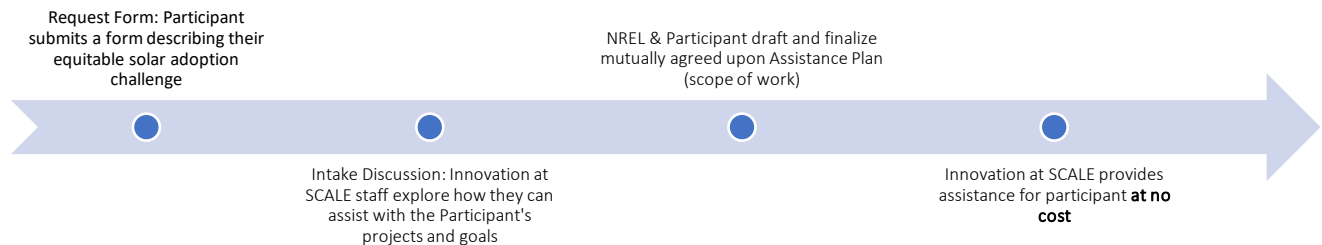
This assistance can be used for:	This assistance can NOT be used for:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Short term, targeted assistance for gaps in technical needs - Customized resources that inform the participant’s decisions about clean energy - Planning assistance for community engagement or workforce development - Techno-economic decision support (using tools like NREL’s REopt) - Consultation with NREL subject matter experts - Project design scoping for a future RFP - Flexible assistance based on participant's current goals and priorities related to past SEIN work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Long-term assistance over the lifecycle 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 be between 3-6 months from start to end.
 1. [Complete a Request Form](#) – Complete the brief request form via the [Innovation at SCALE website](#) about your current challenges with solar adoption and goals for working with SEIN Innovation at SCALE.
 2. [Intake Discussion](#) - After a request form is submitted, the Innovation at SCALE team will schedule a virtual 1-hour intake discussion where we will discuss the organizations 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 90 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 between 2-4 weeks. After the Assistance Plan is drafted by NREL or Innovation at SCALE partner organizations, the participants will have the

chance to review the Assistance Plan, provide feedback, and confirm that this Assistance Plan meets their goals.

4. Deliver Assistance - Once the assistance provider and the participant agree on an Assistance Plan, the Innovation at SCALE team will begin the assistance, communicating regularly with the participant and delivering on the agreed upon tasks. The assistance may be up to 90 staff hours, so depending on the Assistance Plan this process may take between 2-5 months. After the final deliverable, the Innovation at SCALE team will ask for your participation in a voluntary final survey to provide feedback on your experience.



Q: How much does the assistance cost?

- A: This assistance is being offered at **no cost**. SEIN provides funding to NREL staff and partner organizations to execute the Assistance Plan decided upon 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 periods of assistance applications. During each application period please submit a request form and the SEIN team will review and accept requests after each deadline. If you miss a deadline for an application period, please check the [Innovation at SCALE website](#) and apply during the next application period.

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 your confirmed Assistance Plan 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 participant.

Q: What is NREL's goal from this?

- A: NREL is interested in addressing barriers to equitable solar deployment. This effort provides NREL the opportunity 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 10-15 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 website](#) during open application periods.

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

- A: Yes! Participating in SEIN Innovation at SCALE will not be a consideration for future SEIN applications. Future project team 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 future applicants.

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

- A: Yes! However, as stated, participating in SEIN Innovation at SCALE will not provide an advantage in any future competitive selection processes. Resources and analysis provided to participant will need to be supported by a strong application describing how those resources and analysis 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 or Scott.Belding@nrel.gov