“How to Make Solar for All a Reality”: Summary of Opportunities for Funders and Allies

A Peer Convening of Nonprofits and Tribal Organizations
October 7-8, 2025 - Washington, D.C.

Clockwise from Top: Solar for All grantees gathered at Signal House in Northeast DC on Oct. 8th; attendees visit a new solar microgrid being completed at Sycamore & Oak, a hub for Black-owned businesses in Ward 8; Oxon Run, a 2.65 MW low-income community solar project that the group visited on a former brownfield in Southeast DC.

Executive Summary

Solar for All (SFA) was a national and ambitious program aimed at broadening access to solar and solar+storage for low-income households. Following the termination of the program by the U.S. EPA, a group of non-profit and Tribal Solar for All grantees convened in Washington. D.C. to discuss avenues to continue progress towards shared goals. The convening was centered around the question: how can we make Solar for All a reality with or without this federal program, and what support do we need to get there?

This document summarizes the main tenets of the discussion and invites potential funders and allies who seek to continue this critical work to contact any member of the group listed at the end of this document to explore avenues for collaboration and partnership. This group is diverse and includes many types of organizations, including nonprofit solar developers, nonprofit green banks, nonprofit research and advocacy organizations, Tribal governments and organizations, planning and policy organizations, and technical assistance providers, each with distinct and shared strategies and priorities in moving forward.

Collectively, this group still has strong assets — trusted partnerships, a motivated ecosystem of developers and lenders, and a backlog of shovel-ready projects. The challenge now is to identify bridge capital and catalytic support to sustain momentum and deliver benefits to the communities that need them most. To continue advancing equitable solar and solar+storage, participants identified several areas that philanthropy could support, in addition to continued coordination, learning, and information sharing:

A. **Alternative Funding Strategies:** The termination of SFA created a major funding gap as many projects were ready to launch. Strong partnerships, active developers, and shovel-ready projects remain in place. Philanthropic and mission-aligned funders are urgently needed to fill financing gaps and attract additional capital. Critical strategies where support would be most beneficial are:
    1. Provide impact capital that fills critical funding gaps and strengthens the ecosystem
    2. Make the lending ecosystem more efficient with collaboration and shared resources
    3. Support Tribal lenders and Tribal communities with additional capacity
    4. Grow the pool of mission-aligned capital partners (e.g., corporate foundations)

B. **Energy Policy Needs:** States are leading in shaping the solar policy and regulatory landscape, especially as federal support decreases. We see a need to support state policy development and evaluate emerging policies through four lenses: 1) supporting the low-income solar ecosystem, 2) lowering costs for LMI households, 3) enhancing benefits equitably, and 4) managing solar growth alongside storage to maximize grid value. We recommend consideration of the following policy strategies:
    1. Deploy Virtual power plants (VPPs) at scale
    2. Address soft costs and continue supporting tried and true policy tools and engagement, including with Tribes, states, and utilities
    3. Explore how data centers should contribute to funding low-income solar and solar+storage
    4. Support community solar legislation and enabling tools

C. **Communications and Storytelling Strategies:** Campaigns that grow broad public support for solar are needed, in addition to powerful media and storytelling assets. We recommend investing in the following:
    1. Develop a “toolkit” of media assets, focusing on video testimonials, and social media content for communications and outreach
    2. Create a centralized “storybank” of case studies, success stories, and projects to highlight impact and opportunity
    3. Design and launch a PR/advocacy campaign to strengthen public support for local solar

Background

The $7 billion Solar for All (SFA) program under the Inflation Reduction Act's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) was a transformative investment to make the benefits of clean energy available to all Americans – delivering solar to more than 900,000 low-income and disadvantaged households. In the wake of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's announcement that it would terminate the SFA program, the Clean Energy States Alliance (CESA)[1] and GRID Alternatives[2] organized an in-person peer convening in Washington D.C. to bring together the nonprofit and Tribal SFA grantees specifically, to focus on community-building and discuss how to collectively pursue alternative strategies to advance low-income solar and storage, despite the program's termination.

The convening was a success, with attendees from across the country representing most of the nonprofit and Tribal grantees. It provided an opportunity for relationship-building, thought-partnership, and solidarity among the attendees. A crucial outcome was **sector building** - this was the first time that a national group of mission-driven organizations focusing on bringing the benefits of clean energy to all Americans had been gathered together in person, to build consensus around a single question: **how can we make Solar for All a reality with or without this federal program**, and what support do we need to get there?

Our collective answer to that question is what follows here, organized into three categories:

1. **Alternative strategies for funding low-income solar projects** in our collective Solar for All workplans;
2. **State and federal policies** that can unlock this work at scale across the country; and
3. **Communications and storytelling strategies** to drive excitement and investment into the opportunity to leverage solar power to address critical needs in our communities.

We are looking for green lenders and funders, philanthropic organizations, policy-focused organizations, and other allies who want to partner with us to realize these opportunities with funding and other resources. The planning work done by the SFA grantees is a solid foundation to launch this impactful work. Together we can unlock the benefits of solar for low-income households – a massive, underserved portion of the total technical potential for solar in the United States; A 2019 study showed that LMI households represent 47% of U.S. rooftop solar technical potential. This is a largely untapped opportunity to broaden access to solar and storage while driving badly needed workforce development and economic development outcomes for communities across the country.

Alternative Funding Strategies

The Solar For All program was designed to bring low-cost capital to solar projects serving disadvantaged communities. Its termination has left a major funding gap, just as many states and organizations were ready to launch projects developed during the planning phase. This termination not only stalled finance-ready projects, but it also harmed the financial health of the lending ecosystem by damaging the financial outlook of lenders that built budgets based on pipelines and balance sheet enhancements from federal funds.

Despite this setback, the convening showed that this sector has real momentum. Critical cross-sector partnerships remain intact, pipelines of projects are ready, and the Investment Tax Credit (ITC) still offers a short-term window to access federal funding. Current market capital and even impact-oriented capital remain sidelined because of higher costs or untenable terms that don't align with project needs. Without the low-cost

[1] For two years, Clean Energy States Alliance (CESA) has been organizing the community of SFA grantees to share resources and strategies for successful implementation and provide technical assistance.
[2] GRID Alternatives is the country's leading low-income solar implementer, and is uniquely positioned within this group, holding SFA awards in both the multistate nonprofit and tribal categories, and serving as a subrecipient on two others.

capital SFA was supposed to provide, many of these projects are stalled. **We still have strong assets—trusted partnerships, a motivated ecosystem of developers and lenders, and a backlog of shovel-ready projects**. The challenge now is an urgent **need for alternative sources of funding to keep these efforts alive and deliver benefits to the communities that need them most.** Philanthropic partners and other mission-aligned funders can help fill financing gaps to draw in additional capital, stabilize the ecosystem, help move projects forward while the ITC is still available, and support the transition to a post-ITC reality.

Critical funding needs and strategies are:

1. Truly impactful capital that fills critical funding gaps and strengthens the funding ecosystem. Partners have developed strong relationships and robust pipelines of clean energy projects predicated on low-cost financing from federal sources, combined with other capital and incentives. Existing funding sources—both market and impact capital— are often insufficient for many projects in the current environment. Philanthropic capital can thus play a catalytic role in unlocking other forms of investment. Many lenders may benefit from flexible, risk-tolerant capital to help bridge funding gaps for current project pipelines and strengthen their balance sheets to better access outside capital. Philanthropy can do this by providing grants for project funding gaps and predevelopment costs; much lower-cost debt to blend with market capital; and needle-moving credit enhancements like funded guarantees and reserve capital. These can all help unlock larger financing opportunities.

2. Make the Ecosystem More Efficient. With limited resources, lenders need to find ways to better collaborate and amplify the impact of the ecosystem as a whole. With keen insight across the ecosystem, philanthropic partners can play a critical role in helping lenders to use their resources more efficiently by coordinating and consolidating services like legal support, back-office services, origination, and even leveraging financial strengths between lenders. Philanthropy can support matchmaking between institutions to drive co-investment, resource sharing, and streamlined operations. These efforts will reduce costs, improve deal flow, and ensure that community-based lenders remain a resource to low-income communities.

3. Support Tribal Lenders and Communities. Tribal lenders need dedicated support to build capacity for clean energy lending and project development. Many Tribal communities have specific capacity and technical assistance needs, and funding clean energy development on Tribal lands strengthens sovereignty and catalyzes economic growth. Philanthropic partners can provide grant funding for predevelopment costs, technical assistance, workforce development, and staffing support hired from local Tribal communities. Additionally, Tribal lenders play a key role not only as trusted partners in the community but also as experts with unique experience lending in Indian Country. These lenders require resources to develop clean energy lending capacity as well as access to low-cost capital and balance-sheet strengthening funding to participate fully in clean energy financing.

4. Grow the Pool of Capital Partners. Philanthropy must help bring corporate foundations and other capital providers into the fold. We need help telling the story of why low-income solar matters and why these projects deserve investment. Many corporate funders want to support climate and equity goals but don't know where to start. The groundwork is laid—we just need partners to carry it forward. Help us make the case, build trust, and expand the pool of mission-aligned capital.

Energy Policy

With the federal government retreating from clean energy policy, states are once more at the center of clean energy policy development. As a result, the group focused on the big ideas and overarching strategies for

funders to learn about and support, rather than detailing every individual policy or step needed to expand solar access in each state.

In addition, there are four lenses through which funders and other allies could evaluate the usefulness of a state or federal policy regarding solar access in our new market and policy environment:

A. **Does it support the low-income solar ecosystem?** Without the capacity – i.e., the people, the organizations, and the capital – only market-rate solar will be developed in the years ahead. Short-term actions are necessary to support the survival of the ecosystem.
B. **Does it lower the cost of solar for low-income households?** In the wake of the loss of the income tax credits, fostering the affordability of solar for low-income households requires lowering the cost of solar overall. Despite being the lowest-cost power generation asset in the grid's toolbox, solar costs remain higher than they could be, with a high share of soft costs.
C. **Does it improve the benefits of solar for people?** The solar industry does not have the political capital it needs to be resilient to the political pendulum in Washington. Equitable solar policy needs to be developed intentionally and with broad appeal.
D. **Does it manage the growth of solar and its impacts on the grid with storage?** Solar can provide a lot more value to the grid when paired with storage, improve energy affordability, and is not a nascent industry anymore. The solar industry and stakeholders need to account for it.

A few policy avenues to consider:

1. **Deploy VPPs at scale.** Supporting solar generally and supporting affordable power require lowering the cost of the distribution system, and to a lesser extent, of the transmission system. The continuing of tax credits for storage and the pressure put on the grid by load growth make storage a salient, timely, and effective tool to continue progress towards decarbonization and offer benefits to low-income households. Many states have existing Virtual Power Plants (VPPs) programs and some have started weaving equity considerations into related incentives.[3] States could consider supporting VPP deployment and lifting system capacity caps for solar+storage to enable accelerated uptake of these demand flexibility tools. In addition, docket participation by local organizations and related technical assistance should be funded to ensure broad representation of all Americans in building the decentralized and smart power system of the next century.

2. **Address soft costs and continue supporting tried and true policy tools.** Good low-income solar policy rests on a foundation of good state solar policy, including tried and true tools like net metering, LMI carveouts, grants for resilience hubs, on-bill financing, and policies that support and respect Tribal self-determination and sovereignty (e.g., consultation practices and funding set-asides for Tribes), among others. However, the group brought a few strategies to lower the costs of solar forward that deserved additional investigation in this new environment. These are mandating or strongly encouraging automated permitting for solar, and supporting plug-in solar where it makes sense to do so. Unlike the strategies above, these seek to address the soft costs of solar, which can account for a large share of a system's cost.

3. **Explore how data centers should contribute to funding low-income solar.** State renewable energy funds exist nationwide and could further support low-income solar and solar+storage if funded by tariffs on or subsidies from data centers. Data centers are both a threat to the grid and an opportunity to replenish state renewable energy funds. As their rapid growth nationwide deepens anxiety about resource adequacy,

[3] A report on this topic will be available shortly from CESA.

decarbonization, ratepayer costs, and grid reliability, what is a fair share that large load users owe to communities? Other strategies, such as community benefit agreements, renewable energy credit (REC) prepurchase deals, or smart deployment of demand flexibility strategies providing benefits to the grid and to low-income ratepayers, could be used to capitalize on this growth. For example, hyperscalers could fund solar+storage for low-income communities in VPPs in exchange for limited control during peak events.

4. **Support community solar legislation and enabling tools.** Community solar remains a critical tool to broaden solar access for low-income households, but it remains hampered by the lack of enabling legislation in many states. Virtual net metering is particularly useful for projects to offer savings to low-income households, even in multifamily affordable housing settings. Where enabling legislation exists, consolidated billing is a critical tool to ensure that people receive savings that are meaningful, i.e., that they can both see (understand) and feel (have impacts on their well-being). Much work remains to be done to open this tool up in certain parts of the country, and, where these tools do not exist, successful utility engagement, along with Tribal engagement and consultation (where applicable), can go a long way in deploying these projects.

Additional opportunities for continued coordination, learning, and information sharing

Despite its real and challenging consequences for the low-income solar sector, the current market and policy shakeup was seen as perhaps an opportunity to simplify and better coordinate approaches on a national scale. This includes:

- **Continued need for information sharing and broad learning across the network**. For example, participants wanted to better understand opportunities around Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC), opportunity zone financing, and New Market Tax Credits, among other things.
- **Continued and/or improved coordination across actors, including state agencies across the country, to build long-term approaches in policy frameworks**. The swings of federal policy and the short-term, often annual, approaches to many funding programs are not conducive to rational decision-making for businesses. Uncertainty creates risks, which increases costs.

Communications and Storytelling Strategies

Solar and renewable energy programs like SFA face increasing politicization, misinformation, and attacks on both funding and regulatory levels. At the same time, the issue of energy affordability for working people is rising to the top of the national agenda. We have a powerful base of counter-narratives that show the real human, economic, and community benefits of low-income solar, but limited capacity/resources to produce and manage high-quality storytelling assets and media campaigns. We envision a coordinated storytelling effort across our organizations to develop and organize shared resources that ground messaging in the voices of those directly benefiting from low-income solar projects (while also acknowledging that participating organizations will have specific constraints based on their capacity and mission). Paired with a strategic advocacy campaign coordinated with the broader solar industry, this project can depoliticize solar, make local energy savings and energy security bipartisan, and drive interest and investment into our work and project portfolios.

Top communication and storytelling strategies we identified are:

1. Develop a "toolkit" of media assets, focusing on video testimonials, and social media content for communications and outreach. Developing a toolkit of storytelling assets (e.g., case studies, success stories, social media-ready content) would help amplify the human impact of low-income solar projects, and strengthen how we communicate about the benefits of this work broadly. These assets could be generated and

organized by impact area – workforce development, economic development impacts, savings, environmental impacts, etc, for more targeted messaging. By crowdsourcing leads for testimonial content from across partner organizations, we can also develop those leads into stories that feed into a collective storybank (see #2 below). This toolkit of content would help communicate the tangible benefits of these projects through first-person accounts and provide a way to acknowledge the real challenges alongside the successes, creating a more authentic and relatable narrative.

2. Create a centralized "storybank" of case studies, success stories, and projects to highlight impact and opportunity. This would serve as an internal database where organizations could easily share, access, and highlight real-world examples of successful projects and stories. A "story map" could be a visual component to the storybank, allowing users to identify project stories in specific geographic locations. The storymap could also integrate/overlay other geographic/geospatial data like political districts, disadvantaged communities/DACs, high-risk climate areas, etc. This tool could help amplify the low-income solar work already happening in different parts of the US, while also helping tell meaningful stories about the tangible benefits that people and communities are receiving from this work – key for communicating impact to partners, funders, and other stakeholders. The storybank can also highlight the solar potential in Tribal communities, uplifting where solar is viable and where these narratives can support greater investment and partnership.

3. Design and launch a PR/advocacy campaign to strengthen public support for solar. The politicization of solar and renewable energy has led to the defunding and termination of programs designed to lower energy costs and increase savings for economically and environmentally disenfranchised communities. To counter this, we should launch a sector-driven PR and advocacy campaign to build broad, long-term public and Tribal support for clean energy. The campaign would address misconceptions and highlight the economic and workforce development benefits of low-income solar projects, connecting it to inflation, local economic growth, and energy security. Centering real stories ("hearing from our neighbors") would ground the campaign in the voices that directly benefit from these projects. Success will require funding for market research, market testing, staff capacity to monitor and manage online engagement, and a clear structure for individuals and partners to plug in, advocate, and amplify these messages.

We Need Your Help

This document outlines a consensus of strategies and priorities needed to make Solar for All a reality with new funding sources, generated by a collective of Solar for All implementers from across the nation. If you and your organization are committed to helping us make Solar for All a reality regardless of federal funding terminations, let us know where you think you can support one or more of these priorities by reaching out directly - our contact info is below.

We know that funders and allies have limited resources and cannot invest in each one of our organizations and programs separately, which is why we are organizing together and speaking with a collective voice. We are using that collective voice to say that it is time to build a broader sector to bring the benefits of solar power to all Americans and federally recognized Tribes. **Are you in?**

Participating Organizations

Organization & Contact Info	**Areas of Interest for Partnership & Funding Opportunities**
Bonneville Environmental Foundation Nolan Michel, Sr. Mgr., Program Delivery & Ops nmichel@b-e-f.org	Project capital; predevelopment funding; communications & storytelling
Center for Planning Excellence Camille Manning-Broome, CEO & President camille@cpex.org	Community solar; data centers; advocacy/communications
Center for Rural Affairs Daniel Padilla, Climate Lending Director danielp@cfra.org	Community Solar; predevelopment funding; project capital, community resilience/storytelling
Clean Energy Fund of the Carolinas Allie Garrett, Program Director allieg@CEFCarolinas.org	Flexible, risk-tolerant capital; Post-tax credit project finance models; resilience (especially fortified roofs)
Clean Energy Fund of Texas Matthew Carney, Deputy Program Director mcarney@txcef.org	Green bank; project capital; resilience; community solar
Clean Energy States Alliance Vero Bourg-Meyer, Deputy Director vero@cleanegroup.org	Policy; coordination; VPPs/demand flexibility; plug-in solar; messaging
GRID Alternatives Zach Franklin, Strategic Impact Officer zfranklin@gridalternatives.org	Project capital; predevelopment funding; communications & storytelling
Growth Opps Michael Jeans, CEO Michael.Jeans@GrowthOpps.org	Capacity support to reposition and recapitalize
Hopi Utilities Corporation Fletcher Wilkinson, Energy Manager fwilkinson@hopiuc.com	Tribal organization; funding; staff capacity support
Hope Enterprise Corporation Tyler Archie, SVP Community Economic Development tyler.archie@hope-ec.org	Post-tax credit project finance models; consumer financial health; community resilience
Inclusive Prosperity Capital, Inc. Kerry O'Neill, CEO Kerry.Oneill@inclusiveteam.org	Ecosystem partnership and collaboration; Capacity support to reposition and recapitalize
Indiana Community Action Association/Solar Opportunities Indiana Alison Becker, Program Director abecker@incap.org	Capacity support to reposition and recapitalize

Louisiana Clean Energy Fund John O'Donnell, Program Director jodonnell@lacleanenergy.org	Green bank financing partnerships; blended capital opportunities; solar + resilience financing models
Midwest Tribal Energy Resources Association Samantha Travelik, Director of Workforce Development samantha.travelik@mtera.org Andy Bessler, Director of Policy and Advocacy andy.bessler@mtera.org	Tribal organization; capacity building; workforce development; policy coordination.
Nevada Clean Energy Fund Kirsten Stasio, CEO, kirsten@nevadacef.org Asheesh Bhalla, General Counsel, asheesh@nevadacef.org	Nonprofit green bank; project capital for households, affordable housing, and community organizations
Niishu Sustainable Thomas Grace, Contract & Grants Manager thomas.grace@mhanation.com	Tribal organization; capacity building; workforce development; utility development
Puerto Rico Green Energy Trust Nellie M. Gorbea, President and CEO nellie.gorbea@prgreenenergytrust.org	Non-profit; green bank; project capital; resilience
Tanana Chiefs Conference Gary Shu, Infrastructure Director gary.shu@tananachiefs.org	Tribal capacity building; capital and funding; policy coordination.
Texas Energy Poverty Research Institute Kathy Jack, PhD, Director of Energy Programs kathy@tepri.org	Predevelopment funding and project capital; affordable housing; VPP's/demand flexibility; communication & storytelling
Tribal Energy Alternatives Talia Martin, Co-Executive Director tmartin@gridalternatives.org	Project capital; predevelopment funding; communications & storytelling