



Board of Commissioners of Cook County

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Chicago, IL

Legislation Text

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REPORT

Department: Department of Environment & Sustainability

Report Title: Cook County Solar Schools Grant Program Board Report 2021

Report Period: 10/1/2020 - 9/30/2021

Summary: As required by Resolution Number 20-2567 establishing the Cook County K-12 Solar Schools Initiative that was approved by the Board of Commissioners on May 21, 2020, the following is the 2021 Annual Report for the Cook County Solar Schools Grant program to be submitted at the September 2021 Cook County Board Meeting.

Program Information

The Cook County Solar Schools Grant provides supplemental funding to grantees of the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation's (ICECF) K-12 Solar Schools Program, a program that supports the installation of 1kW photovoltaic (PV) systems throughout Illinois institutions serving grades K-12. To receive supplemental funding through the Cook County Solar Schools program, applicants must serve the K-12 population in Cook County, Illinois; be a recognized public school by the IL State Board of Education (ISBE); and be a grantee of the ICECF's K-12 Solar Schools Program. If more applications are received than funding available, preference is given to Title-1 school-wide funded and Title-1 school-wide eligible schools, in which children from low-income families make up at least 40% of the enrollment.

The Cook County Solar Schools program may award up to \$4,999 per school including:

- Up to 10% of the remaining costs of the 1kw PV system, not covered by ICECF, including supplies, installation and labor, not to exceed \$2,000.
- An award of up to \$1,500 to the school for the purposes of setting up an operations and maintenance fund for the PV system to ensure its long-term operation for the school community.
- Up to \$1,500 towards the costs of the Solarbration event and educational resources related to renewable energy, and/or signage for the installation.

Program Promotion

The program was promoted for the ICECF's Winter 2021 grant cycle. The following methods were used, among others.

- Listed as a resource link on the ICECF's K-12 Solar Schools grant website as well as on the DES website.
- Hosted webinar on January 14, 2021 with 51 registered, 32 attended.
- Emailed all Cook County Commissioners requesting assistance with outreach.
- Included program details in the January 11, 2021 DES Newsletter.
- Sent 4 emails to school principals, school districts and regional offices.
- Reached out to Metropolitan Mayor's Caucus, IL State Board of Education Regional Offices, and others and asked them to help market the program.
- Tweeted 12 tweets and tweet threads (18 retweets) from December - February

Completed Applications Status

The application deadline was February 23, 2021. There were a total of 33 (thirty-three) applications received.

There were 5 (five) applications that were found to be not qualified because they had not also applied for or accepted the ICECF grant. There was 1 (one) that was found to be not qualified because they already had a system installed through the ICECF program and are eligible for a repair grant from Cook County.

Therefore, this left 27 (twenty-seven) qualified applicants. It was determined that appropriation available would allow funding of all eligible applicants, since the cost of the small demonstration solar panel systems has decreased in the last year.

The qualified applicants were sent grant agreements for signature, in the amount of \$4,000. There was 1 (one) applicant that decided to turn down the grant, because they decided to pursue another type of larger solar energy project.

After grant agreements were sent to all schools, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) raised issues with the ICECF's grant agreement, separate from and unrelated to Cook County's grant. After discussions, CPS indicated that they would not agree to terms in the ICECF's grant agreement and that CPS schools would not be accepting the ICECF grants. As a result, CPS schools were ineligible for supplemental funding through the Cook County grant.

This leaves 15 (fifteen) schools that were eligible for Cook County Solar Schools Grants. The list of awardees is attached.

2021 Grant Cycle

ICECF's next grant cycle is open until August 24, 2021 and DES has opened the Solar Schools grant application again. The County will then award matching supplemental grants to qualified schools that have applied.

Solar Repair Funds

Additionally, the Cook County Solar Schools Grant program allowed funding of necessary repairs of current ICECF grantee schools' solar installations that are no longer working as they should. These repairs are only funded by the County and there is no ICECF funding. ICECF has alerted DES that there are eleven (11) schools in Cook County that fall into this category. In total the repairs would cost between \$8,000-\$10,000 total for all 11 schools. DES is working with ICECF to determine the best process to work with these schools to implement these repairs so that the solar panels are again functional and can be used as a learning instrument.

Next Steps

- The ICECF's engineer is working with schools to plan details of their solar panel installations.
- Schools have one year, per the ICECF, to install PV installation and host the Solarbration.
- When schools have proof of installation, curriculum in use, photos, and the system online that is acceptable to ICECF, ICECF pays the schools, and schools can then submit appropriate documentation to Cook County for payment of supplemental funds.
- DES has again opened the grant application for ICECF's August cycle.

Reappropriation of Funds

DES will recommend re-appropriating the full amount of the original \$120,000 in funds in the Department's FY2022 budget. The funding request has been made to the Department of Budget and Management Services, as some amount of the funds will not be spent during FY2021 and the schools have one year to complete their projects.