

## SOMAH Public Forum Notes

**Date:** December 4, 2020

**Time:** 1PM - 3:20 PM

### Welcome & Introductions

Kajsa Hendrickson, SOMAH Marketing, Education and Outreach (ME&O) Manager, gave an overview of the purpose of the forum, as well as the agenda, and introduced members of the SOMAH Program Administrator Team (SOMAH PA). Kajsa began by stating that SOMAH stands in solidarity with Black Lives Matter and with all who are fighting for a just and equitable future, and additionally acknowledged the profound emotional and practical impacts of ongoing wildfires, the COVID-19 pandemic and continuing economic uncertainty.

### Session 1: Program Update

Sarah Hill, SOMAH Program Manager, gave a brief overview of the SOMAH program and presented a year in review for the first full calendar year of the SOMAH program. Application statistics are listed in the table below:

Utility Territory	# of Active Applications	# of Waitlist Applications
Pacific Gas & Electric	194	0
Southern California Edison	123	0
San Diego Gas & Electric	62	7
Liberty	1	0
PacifiCorp	2	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>382</b>	<b>7</b>

Program Handbook updates were also highlighted in this session, and included the finalization of the second SOMAH Handbook in June 2020 (with a MASH/SOMAH “stacking” resolution, the filing of an Advice Letter for modification of pipeline management), and the filing of an Advice Letter regarding progress payments in mid-September.

SOMAH PA also provided updates on the following areas:

- Program Handbook (AL#114)

- Progress Payment (AL#118)
- Pension for Modification
- 2021 ME&O Plan

There were no questions from the audience during this session.

## **Session 2: SOMAH Program Evaluation: Recommendations and Next Steps**

Verdant, the third-party evaluator, completed Phase 1 of the evaluation in August which included seven findings and recommendations. Jae Berg, SOMAH Program Manager discussed the Program Evaluation progress with an overview of evaluation recommendations and next steps for the evaluation process. The presentation focused on two of the seven recommendations: Recommendation #2 to tighten workforce development requirements and Recommendation #3 to develop benchmarks on applicant diversity. There was a separate Q&A discussion for each recommendation.

### **Session 2 Q&A - Recommendation #2**

**Q:** Do we know what the current rate of local and targeted hires are? Would it depend on the region?

**A:** The SOMAH PA does not currently have these rates because projects currently in the queue have not reached the Incentive Claim Milestone where job training information is collected, and only one project has reached this milestone. More projects are projected to the Incentive Claim stage within the next few months, so the SOMAH PA will be then equipped to prepare that baseline for local and targeted hires.

**Q:** What does the outreach look like to organizations working with job trainees?

**A:** The SOMAH program works with 80 job training organizations (JTOs) throughout the state including community colleges, nonprofits and others that serve diverse populations and targeted populations (e.g. previously incarcerated folks). Currently about 48% of trainees on the job training (JT) portal would be considered targeted hires. The SOMAH Program also has a partnership with the Rising Sun Center for Opportunity to support job training opportunities, as well as the JTO Task Force which is identifying barriers and generating strategies to overcome these barriers.

### **Session 2 Q&A - Recommendation #3**

**Q:** A lot of solar contractors specialize in low-income DAC development. A cap on those contractors would limit participation from eligible low-income developers, similar to the SGIP program which got rid of the developer cap for the low-income equity budget.

**A:** The SOMAH PA agrees there is currently a small pool of contractors specializing in low-income and disadvantaged communities' development. If a contractor cap was developed, the SOMAH PA would first analyze how this cap would impact all program areas, including reaching the target capacity of 300 MW.

**Q:** Is there an ongoing SOMAH platform to collect contractor barrier information?

**A:** The SOMAH PA completed its contractor barrier survey earlier this fall and may roll it out again next year to continue to receive feedback from eligible contractors. The SOMAH PA always wants to hear feedback from stakeholders, please reach out at [contact@calsomah.org](mailto:contact@calsomah.org).

### **Session 3: Supporting Disadvantaged Communities (DACs)**

Chris Walker, SOMAH Program Manager, and Blanca de la Cruz, Sustainable Housing Program Director of the CA Housing Partnership, reviewed property eligibility criteria for SOMAH in regards to how that may apply to supporting DACs and how DACs are determined through the CalEnviroScreen 3.0. They walked through how to use the CalEnviroScreen 3.0 map to determine if a property is in fact in a DAC and the different indicators for community impact (economic, environmental, among others).

They explained how prioritizing properties in DACs is key to SOMAH's tenet of centering equity and environmental justice in the solar industry and beyond, and asked the audience how the SOMAH PA can support the prioritization of properties in DACs, and if a benchmark for DAC participation should be set.

#### **Session 3, Q&A**

**Q:** I am wondering if there is movement around expanding the definition of DACs, has there been any more conversation about that or if there has been any possibility through the third party evaluators of that expansion, such as properties within a quarter mile of a DAC or across the street?

**A:** To make this change to the definition of a DAC would require going through the regulatory process to update the definition of a DAC. At this time, the SOMAH PA is not pursuing regulatory efforts to change the definition of a DAC and is focusing efforts on time on the progress payments advice letter (AL) and AL 114 with other program changes.

**Q:** I am a private homeowner and I'm wondering if my property qualifies. Could I have SOMAH install the solar?

**A:** Please reach out to the [contact@SOMAH.org](mailto:contact@SOMAH.org). SOMAH does have an online bidding

tool to help property owners find the best contractor for their project, and the SOMAH PA can answer eligibility questions and provide application support.

**Q:** Is SOMAH still planning on moving to an installment payment for the incentive?

**A:** Yes. The SOMAH PA has submitted two advice letters to propose progress payments to the Energy Division of the CPUC. The first one was submitted in September of this year to propose the change and has gone through commenting and protest periods. After a round of edits, the SOMAH PA submitted a supplemental advice letter to strengthen the proposal with stakeholders' feedback and just closed the commenting and protest periods for that supplemental advice letter. The SOMAH PA is currently working on the reply to comments, and once that is complete, the advice letter will be in the hands of the Energy Division to approve or reject the proposed changes.

**Q:** I understand that the progress payments are still in the regulatory process, but is there a general timeline on when we will know if progress payments are approved?

**A:** The SOMAH is unable to speculate on a timeline for progress payments, as the approval of the advice letter depends on the Energy Division.

**Q:** If you are successful with outreach to Central Valley and LA County, how do you plan to connect interested affordable housing owners with us, solar developers? Through Track A?

**A:** Track A is SOMAH's upfront TA offering and through Track A, the SOMAH PA provides property owners with objective information about the onsite solar potential as well as prospective financial information which can include in an upfront TA report with these key metrics. Property owners in Track A also receive the benefit of working with an expert Energy Project Manager to walk them through the process and answer questions that come up. The culmination of the upfront TA offering is when the project is put onto SOMAH's online bidding portal and when the property owner selects three solar contractors they would like to receive bids from. The bidding portal allows property owners to have an apples-to-apples comparison of key metrics from those contractors so they can select the bid best for their project. The SOMAH PA is looking forward to more upfront TA applications in 2021, including in the Central Valley, and is also looking to continue engaging with contractors through the bidding portal.

**Q:** Can you utilize MASH funds for the common area portion on a job and SOMAH payments for the tenant offset?

**A:** Yes, but there are restrictions. SOMAH funds can be used for tenant systems and the MASH incentive can be used for common area systems, but they need to be separate PV systems with separate interconnection applications. What is not eligible is stacking the systems; it's not possible to use SOMAH and MASH funding for a single PV system. Please reach out to the SOMAH PA for any SOMAH/MASH funding questions.

**Q:** For the MASH and SOMAH situation in the previous questions, would that arrangement work on a virtual net-energy metering (VNEM) job?

**A:** The SOMAH/tenant system is required to use VNEM to ensure the PV system would provide direct financial benefits for tenants. The MASH/common area system would not have to be a VNEM system, since MASH does not require VNEM, although it is an option. The common area system could use regular net energy metering.

**Q:** MASH allows master-metered low-to-moderate income (LMI) properties, do you think SOMAH will allow this at some point?

**A:** All properties that go through SOMAH need to interconnect through the SOMAH VNEM tariff to ensure that tenants receive financial benefit from the program. For master-metered projects, there is currently no mechanism in place to ensure the financial benefits are passed onto the tenants. This subject may be raised in future evaluations of the program, but presently the SOMAH PA is not pursuing actions to increase eligibility to master-metered properties.

## Looking Ahead & Next Steps

Kajsa Hendrickson provided an overview of next steps, noting that the Public Forum slide deck would be emailed to registered participants on CalSOMAH.org. Public Forum notes would follow in a week's time. Q1 2021 Forum information is forthcoming.

For additional questions and feedback, please contact the SOMAH PA:

**Email:** [contact@CalSOMAH.org](mailto:contact@CalSOMAH.org)

**Web form:** [CalSOMAH.org/contact-us](https://CalSOMAH.org/contact-us)

**General hotline:** 858-244-1177 ext. 5

**Tenant hotline:** 800-843-9728