



HOUSEHOLD SOLAR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGE

Call for Proposals



Photo Credit: Rachel Couch for Power Africa

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I. INTRODUCTION

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the ResilientAfrica Network (RAN) have launched a call for proposals under the Household Solar Workforce Development Challenge, as part of the Scaling Off-Grid Energy Grand Challenge for Development (SOGE). SOGE seeks to accelerate growth in the off-grid solar home system market to provide millions of households and businesses across sub-Saharan Africa with access to modern, clean, and affordable electricity. However, talent acquisition and retention for off-grid solar home system companies remains an ongoing industry challenge, limiting enterprise growth and the sector's capacity to scale and mature as an industry.

BACKGROUND

Off-grid solar home systems (SHS) are an emerging solution to the electrification of sub-Saharan Africa. According to Global Off-Grid Lighting Association (GOGLA), globally, the off-grid solar sector has an estimated annual growth rate of 140% that is primarily driven by pay-as-you-go (PAYG) business models and 'plug-and-play' solar home system technology. With continued growth, the sector could support up to 1.3 million full time equivalent jobs by 2022.

Hiring and retaining qualified employees has been challenging for many solar home system (SHS) companies¹. These jobs include positions in management, sales and distribution, installation, repair, and technical maintenance. Challenges include lack of candidates' technical and "soft skills", lack of relevant and context-based curricula on off-grid systems at the certificate level, the inability of the sector to compete for fresh graduates with higher-paying established companies, high-performing employees being poached by competitors, and a lack of capital to invest in the continued training and professional development of current employees. Furthermore, in Africa, SHS solutions are often deployed in rural and remote areas where it can be even harder to attract and retain staff.

In the absence of qualified workforce candidates, some off-grid solar companies have established training programs to meet their individual company's human resource capacity needs, arguably detracting from their core business of sales and distribution. However, these programs vary widely based on a given company's capacity, and no standardized curriculum exists across the industry in the region. Third-party organizations that focus on training offer a viable, and potentially more efficient and effective solution, but are not yet widely supported or utilized.

The specific objectives of this funding window are to identify and support scalable, innovative, third-party training solutions to the off-grid solar home system sector's workforce needs in sub-Saharan Africa.

¹ Forbes Africa (2019). "Renewable Power Surge In Africa Faces A Shortout: Not Enough Workers" <https://www.forbesafrica.com/focus/2019/01/31/renewable-power-surge-in-africa-faces-a-shortout-not-enough-workers/>

2. WHO WE ARE

This call is an initiative of the ResilientAfrica Network (RAN) supported by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) as part of its commitment to the Scaling Off-Grid Energy (SOGE) Grand Challenge for Development.

The ResilientAfrica Network (RAN) headquartered at Makerere University, School of Public Health is a primarily USAID-funded Research and Innovation network currently operating in 20 African Universities in 13 countries across sub-Saharan Africa. RAN is strengthening the resilience of vulnerable communities using innovative, evidence-based approaches developed in collaboration with university students, faculty and the community. The RAN team also nurtures and upholds strategic partnerships to strengthen the innovation ecosystem (fostering a culture of innovation and creativity) in Africa and beyond.

The core objective of RAN is to promote the development and scaling of sustainable, innovative solutions and approaches that can help strengthen the capacities of African communities to mitigate, adapt to or recover from natural or man-made shocks and stresses, thereby strengthening their resilience.

SOGE is a global partnership founded by USAID, Power Africa, the U.K. Department for International Development (DFID), the African Development Bank, and the independent charity Shell Foundation. By optimizing the collective resources and expertise of its partners, SOGE accelerates the growth of a dynamic, commercial off-grid energy market to provide clean, modern, and affordable energy access to the millions of households and businesses beyond the grid in sub-Saharan Africa.

3. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

The call is open, but not limited to: for-profit and nonprofit organizations, social enterprises, programs under academic institutions and non-government organizations (NGOs) with demonstrated capabilities and programs in energy workforce development and capacity building that are ready to scale.

This call seeks third-party training providers that are designed with features including, but not limited to, initiatives that train management staff, technicians, or sales agents for the off-grid solar home system sector.

Solar home system companies seeking to build out in-house training capabilities exclusively focused on their own employees/staff **will not be considered**. Companies engaging in training individuals for employment throughout the sector (i.e. trainees are then suitable for hire by multiple companies) are eligible.

Joint proposals by two or more applicants are welcome. Applicants may also submit proposals that include individual consultants, non-profit organizations, and industry

associations as implementing partners. In all such instances, a single individual or organization must serve as the lead applicant.

Geographical scope: All proposed activities must take place in sub-Saharan Africa.

Project period: All proposed activities must take place within one year of the award.

4. ELIGIBLE USE OF GRANT FUNDS

Grant funds must be for direct programmatic costs associated with the development of an off-grid solar workforce. Examples of eligible uses of grant funds are listed below. Please note that this list is intended to be illustrative and applicants may include other expenditures that are direct costs in the training program. RAN reserves the right to screen and accept or reject all the costs presented by applicants. Applicants must indicate what training they propose to deliver in their training program description.

- Personnel costs for instructors to conduct training, fringe benefits, and/or personnel costs for tasks associated with programmatic reporting requirements.
- Costs for screening and placement of individuals in the training program.
- Costs for training materials and work gear associated with the training curriculum.
- Development and refinement of existing curricula for training.
- Implementing outreach activities directed toward engaging prospective employers to be involved in the job training program and to hire graduates.
- Scaling already running programs geographically and also with some defined personnel categories where applicable; for example, including field managers in programs initially targeting off-grid solar technicians.

5. EVALUATION CRITERIA

1. **Viability** - Proposals will be assessed as to whether the proposed activities are realistic and achievable. This will include an evaluation of the overall project plan, proposed timeline and budget as well as other implementation risks such as whether relationships with key implementation partners already exist or not.
2. **Relevance to Challenge Objectives / Quality and Innovativeness of Technical Approach** - Proposals will be assessed on the degree to which the project aligns with the Call's objectives and represents an innovative approach. A significant component will be the responsiveness of the training to the off grid solar sector's human resource hiring needs. Proposals will be assessed on the ability of the applicant to consistently and innovatively solicit feedback from the hiring companies and the trainees (while in training as well as afterward), with the ultimate aim to adaptively incorporate those changes into trainings. Proposals will also be assessed on the accessibility of their training to, and inclusion of, women, rural youth, and other vulnerable populations.
3. **Potential impact and sustainability** - Proposals will be assessed on the potential for projects to achieve long-term impacts on the training, staffing and hiring

challenges of the off grid solar sector, including *beyond* the life of the grant itself. Grant milestones may be tied to the number of trained individuals hired by solar home system companies, the level of satisfaction of those companies with trainee-hires, and trainee-hire retention rates. Proposals should demonstrate a model for financial sustainability beyond the funding provided by the grant.

4. **Scalability:** Proposals will be assessed on the potential to scale the workforce development model, including to other country markets.
5. **Cost-efficiency:** Proposals will be assessed on whether the project's budget is reasonable given the activities undertaken, intended outcomes of the project itself, and the potential impacts described above. Where possible, proposals should demonstrate how the cost of training can continue to decrease with improved efficiencies, as the program scales to accommodate an increasing number of trainees.
6. **Capacity of applicant:** Proposals will be assessed on the capacity of the applicant to deliver the project based on prior experience and organizational capacity. This will include an assessment of capacity to comply with reporting requirements during project implementation. If applicants have pre-existing relationships with partners that enhance their capacity, please note them (e.g. If the training is certified by a third-party organization such as a trade association, or is recognized by a regulatory or government body).

6. GRANTEES SELECTED FOR AWARDS

The selected organizations will receive awards ranging from USD 100,000 to USD 350,000 for project implementation over the course of one year. RAN reserves the right to award a larger or smaller grant amount. RAN may also apply additional geographic, thematic, gender, and other considerations as additional evaluation criteria. Applications may also undergo additional USAID review including initial environmental impact assessment, vetting, special notification, and approval by an applicant's country USAID Mission. A responsibility determination will be conducted on all applicants for their status regarding United States Government (USG) sanctioned individuals and entities as those ineligible to apply include any individuals participating in, linked to, or sponsoring subversive activities including criminal acts, terrorism or related activities.

Applications that are awarded grants are bound by all provisions of the RAN Cooperative Agreement which flow down to any subsequent sub-awards. This also includes title to and use of Intangible (Intellectual) Property where "Intangible Property" means, but is not limited to, copyrights, inventions and patents, and data first produced under the RAN Cooperative Agreement. Intangible property is subject to the requirements set forth in the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations on Administration of Assistance Awards to U.S. Non-Governmental Organizations (22 CFR 226.36).

7. RESOURCES BEYOND THE AWARD

Applicants that receive awards shall be responsible for costs incurred for project expenses that exceed the grant amount awarded in this call. Grant money and other reimbursement amounts will be paid through an agreement with RAN and are subject to the availability of funds. RAN reserves the right to determine the grant amount awarded to an applicant and to vary grant amounts among selected finalists based on analysis of the proposed project budget and the availability of funds. The Judging Panel, RAN and USAID reserve the right to reassess the technical requirements and performance evaluation criteria, and are not obligated to make any awards should no applicants match the selection criteria.

8. IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

The key milestones for the call are highlighted below.

Milestone	Dates
Call open for applications	October 16, 2019
Closing date for questions related to the Challenge or application content.	November 29, 2019
Closing date for applications	December 15, 2019

9. GET INVOLVED

To apply please submit your proposal via the RAN grants website as per the stipulated guidelines on: solarworkforce.ranlab.org

RAN will be regularly updating the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document posted to the website. Please review the FAQ document for prior answers before submitting any new questions.

For more details please contact us on:

Email: solarworkforce@ranlab.org

Tel: +256 31 225 1353

10. CONDITIONS OF ENTRY

All applicants may be added to RAN, USAID, and SOGE mailing lists and contact databases, and may receive information on relevant activities.

RAN, USAID, and SOGE may use the information about winning proposals and lessons learned from project implementation for public information purposes and to promote the call via such media as websites, brochures, and events.

All decisions are final.

RAN reserves the right to adjust, strike, or redefine any of the Challenge's terms and conditions at any time and for any reason.