

ILLUME

SOB SOMAH CONTRACTOR INTERVIEW GUIDE

PREPARED FOR: VERDANT ASSOCIATES, CPUC

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INTRODUCTION & RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The ILLUME team will conduct 4 interviews with contractors who have participated in the SOMAH application process, and 2 who have not participated. Broadly, the primary goal is to learn from contractors what is working well, what could be improved, and any participation barriers. Specific research areas and attendant questions are included in the table below.

We will recruit participating and non-participating contractors for in-depth interviews via email. The ILLUME team received a sample of contacts from Verdant Associates which included 9 contractor companies which had completed between 1 and 252 projects. From this sample, we will attempt to recruit a mix of contractors including those who have completed a high volume of projects and those who have a lower volume of projects. We will contact organizations up to three times in an attempt to schedule the 6 in-depth interviews. For this research, we identify non-participants as contractors who have attended the Applicant and Contractor Eligibility Training but have either not submitted an application or have submitted but cancelled the application.

Research Topics and Questions

Research Area	research questions	ADDRESSED BY GUIDE
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Role in company decision-making● Who in the company is responsible for new business bids or applications for new projects?● What are the roles and responsibilities of members of the team?● What is the team structure on projects in the SOMAH program?	1
Motivation to Participate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● What motivates contractors to participate in the program? What program benefits are most motivating?	2
Program Onboarding, Engagement, and Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● What program trainings or workshops did your teams attend? How helpful were the trainings? (i.e. Applicant and Contractor Eligibility Training, Application updates)	3

	<p>webinar, COVID-19 Construction Safety with Cal/OSHA Tenant Education Training, etc.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● For contractors who have participated in program trainings, how effective are these trainings in preparing staff to participate in the program? ● What types of additional support/resources, if any, does your organization need from program staff? 	
Application and Program Experience (Participants only)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What is a 'typical' SOMAH job process and experience, including all steps and interactions? ● What works well with the program? ● What barriers exist? What keeps projects from moving forward? Is program financing and access to capital a barrier to participation? ● How does the organization/PM/contractors engage with the program? What are the internal processes around steps to participation? ● To what extent does program financing and access to capital present a barrier to participation for (smaller) contractors and property owners who are unable to float the cost of the system until the incentive is paid? ● How did contractors gather the information necessary for the application and reservation request? ● What are contractor interactions with property owners and tenants? How do contractors verify the residents' income? ● How do contractors identify eligible affordable housing properties? ● What is the process of finding and hiring job trainees? How much support do organizations need from Job Training Organizations (JTOs) or the SOMAH PA? 	4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14
Program Value and Overall Satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Why do some contractors go through training and/or submit reservation request packages and then choose not to participate? ● What is the impact of SOMAH on businesses? ● How satisfied are contractors with the program overall? ● What are the opportunities for program improvement? 	15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20

CONTRACTOR SEGMENTS

Our aim is to complete n=6 interviews total: n=4 with contractors who are in the process of completing SOMAH jobs, and n=2 who have completed contractor training but have either not submitted a reservation request or have submitted one and cancelled or suspended it.

METHODOLOGY

We will conduct in-depth phone calls with contractors using the Zoom video conference platform, which enables video, screen-sharing, and recording to the cloud for note-taking purposes. We estimate these interviews will be an hour to 90 minutes in duration each.

RECRUITING AND SCHEDULING SCRIPTS

We will send advance emails to contractors with email addresses on file to introduce the research and follow up with them by email or phone to schedule an interview. The scripts for each effort are below.

INTERVIEW RECRUITING EMAILS

PARTICIPATING CONTRACTORS

The email below will be sent to participating SOMAH program contractors, by the ILLUME team to recruit participants for an interview.

Subject: SOMAH Program – Discussion Invitation

Hi [FIRST NAME],

My name is Allison with ILLUME Advising. We are conducting research about the SOMAH Program with a goal of understanding the experience of contractors, and to learn from a member or members of your team responsible for guiding or overseeing the processes and activities involved in program participation.

In addition to understanding program experience in general, we will aim to understand what is working well, barriers that may prevent participation, and what can be improved in how the program operates.

To this end, we are conducting 1-hour & 15-minute interviews with participating contractors. If you are one of the people responsible for SOMAH program processes, we would like to speak with you. If there is someone else in your organization who works more closely with the program, please let us know so that we can contact them.

Please respond to this email regarding whether you are interested in participating, and if any of the days/times listed below will work for your schedule. If none of these will work, please let me know what alternatives might be better and we will do our best to accommodate them.

- Option A
- Option B
- Etc.

Allison Musvosvi
Senior Analyst

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C: 608.571.4890

ILLUME Advising

[SMALL TEXT AT THE BOTTOM OF THE EMAIL] ILLUME Advising is a third-party research company hired to conduct a study of the SOMAH program. Anything you share with us will be kept confidential. Your opinions will be reported in aggregate with the opinions of other study participants, unless otherwise noted.

NON-PARTICIPATING CONTRACTORS

The email below will be sent to non-participating SOMAH program contractors, by the ILLUME team to recruit participants for an interview.

Subject: SOMAH Program – Discussion Invitation

Hello [FIRST NAME],

My name is Allison with ILLUME Advising. We are conducting research about the SOMAH Program with a goal of understanding the experience of contractors with the SOMAH program. We are contacting you because a key research goal is understanding barriers that may be preventing participation and what can be improved in how the program operates.

To this end, we are conducting 30-minute interviews with contractors. We would like to speak to the person or people in your organization who was responsible for or involved with activities and decisions regarding SOMAH participation. If this is another member of your organization, please let us know so that we can contact them.

Please respond to this email regarding whether you are interested in participating, and if any of the days/times listed below will work for your schedule. If none of these will work, please let me know what alternatives might be better and we will do our best to accommodate them.

- Option A
- Option B
- Etc.

Thank you for your time,

Allison Musvosvi
Senior Analyst
amusvovi@illumeadvising.com
C: 608.571.4890
ILLUME Advising

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INTERVIEW CONFIRMATION - EMAIL

The email below will be sent to contractors who agree to participate in the research to confirm their scheduled interview.

Subject: SOMAH Program – Discussion Confirmation

Hi [FIRST NAME],

Thank you for scheduling a time to talk with me about your experience with the SOMAH program. We look forward to our conversation on [INSERT INTERVIEW DATE].

About 5 minutes before our start-time, please use this link to access the Zoom conferencing platform:

Join by Smartphone or Computer

[ZOOM LINK]

The link should open in your browser; you will not need to download any application or software.

You can call-in using the online platform, or dial-in directly through:

OR Join by Telephone

Dial: [NUMBER]

Meeting ID: [NUMBER]

If you have any questions about this research or how to use the Zoom platform or call-in number, please call [contact name] at [number] or reply to this email.

Thank you for your time,

Allison Musvosvi

Senior Analyst

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ILLUME Advising

INTRODUCTION

The following guide provides an outline of the conversation that the researcher will have with the program participant. This initial section includes a guide for the beginning of the conversation and a few initial questions to establish rapport with the participant. This guide is not a script for the conversation, rather, it highlights the lines of questioning we anticipate exploring with participants and the topics we will delve into. When conducting in-depth interviews, ILLUME researchers reflect the language of participants and explore the areas of interest and concern to participants. In some cases, this may mean that the interview topics below are covered by the researcher in a different order than listed here. Similarly, the interviewer will use their own words in asking these questions so that they are integrated into the flow of a conversation, and where relevant, will reflect the terminology used by the participant.

INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for agreeing to talk to us about your experience with the SOMAH Program. My name is [NAME] and I work for ILLUME Advising, an independent, national research company. We are working on an evaluation of the SOMAH program and would like to learn about your company's and your experiences thus far in the program. Before we can continue, can I confirm that you are familiar with and/or have worked with the SOMAH Program?

We have questions about:

- Your role and your organization
- Your experience with the program, including what works well and what could be improved, and
- Program satisfaction

We encourage you to be as open as possible. There are no right or wrong answers, and these interviews are confidential and your responses will only be provided in aggregate with those provided by other contractors.

With your permission I'd like to record this discussion for our reporting and note taking purposes. We will not include identifying information about you in our reporting, nor will it be used for any advertising or commercial purposes.

1. Do I have your consent to begin recording? [Begin recording after agreeing to it]
2. Do you have any other questions before I begin?

CONTEXT

1. Can we start by telling me about **your company** and **your role** within it in general and as it relates to SOMAH projects? *Prompt if necessary:*
 - a. How long has your company been in business?
 - b. How long have you been with your company?
 - c. About how many employees are in the company?
 - d. What services/type of projects does your company offer/do?
 - e. What is a typical project team structure in your company?
 - f. **[Participating contractors]** What are your primary activities and responsibilities in your current role as it relates to SOMAH? Who else is involved with this?
2. **[Participating contractors] Decision to Participate.** How did your company decide to participate in the SOMAH program? *Prompt if necessary:*
 - a. What factors influenced this decision—what were the primary motivations?
 - b. Who were the decision makers?
 - c. Were there any concerns that would have prevented your company from applying to the program?

3. **[Participating contractors] Program onboarding, Engagement, and Training.** What steps were involved in becoming eligible to participate in SOMAH?
 - a. What program trainings or workshops did your team attend? How did you decide who on your team would attend the trainings?
 - b. How well did these equip you to participate in the program and get a project through the different processes?
 - c. What worked well in this process?
 - d. Were there any barriers or difficulties? *Probe on ways to resolve these.*

4. **[Participating contractors] Lead generation.** How has your business gone about generating SOMAH project leads?
 - a. Do you approach property owners or vice versa?
 - a. If you approach them, are you educating them on the program, and if so, how?
 - b. How do you identify eligible properties? Do you ever use the Eligible Properties Map on the program website?
 - c. Are there any types of properties (size of property, location, part of a larger portfolio, past customer, etc.) that you specifically target outbound marketing to? Why?
 - b. Have you been contacted for quotes via the online bidding tool? *Probe experience.*
 - a. Did your organization experience any difficulties related to online bidding tool requests? *Probe on ways to resolve these.*
 - b. Did the online bidding tool result in the submittal of any applications by your organization? If no, why do you think that is? (probe to see if property owner provided them any feedback on why they were not going with the bid they provided?)
 - c. Have you experienced any challenges generating SOMAH leads? Please describe. How have you attempted to overcome these challenges?

5. **[Participating contractors] Overall Perceptions.** We will get into specifics about the application and how you scope jobs, and so on, but can you tell me your overall perception of the SOMAH Program and your experience with it?
 - a. Do you feel there is sufficient engagement and/or program resources to navigate the program?
 - b. Who do you engage with primarily relating to SOMAH and program projects?

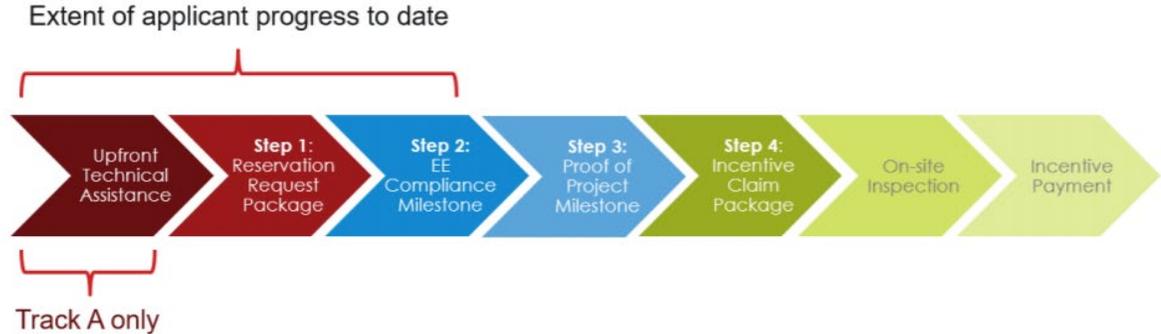
6. **[Non-participating contractors] Overall Perceptions.** We will get into some specific questions later, but can you tell me your overall perception of the SOMAH Program?

[Non-participants continue to Question 15]

APPLICATION AND PROGRAM EXPERIENCE [PARTICIPANTS ONLY]

7. How far along has your team made it in the SOMAH application process?
[Interviewer to screenshare this figure from a separate slide to assist participant response to this question and the next]

FIGURE 1-1: SOMAH PROGRAM APPLICATION STEPS



8. Can you walk me through the steps you go through for a SOMAH project? We're interested in the entire project lifecycle, including the steps involved in the initial upfront technical assistance (if applicable), reservation request application, milestones (Energy Efficiency Compliance and Proof of Project milestones), incentive claim package, on-site inspection, and incentive payment? *Prompt if necessary:*
- a. Who is typically designated as the "Applicant" for the projects you work on? (your company, the property owner, or someone else)
 - b. For each Application Step discussed, probe on the following:
 - i. What is typically your company's role (and/or responsibilities) during this step vs. the property owner?
 - ii. What worked well in this process?
 - iii. Were there any barriers or difficulties for your team? What about for property owners? Probe on application materials/forms required for each Application Step (see excel sheet with list)
 - iv. What kind of support did your team need to get this application step completed? *Probe on what this was and who provided it.*
 - c. Probes for specific Application Steps [if needed]:
 - i. Track A: Technical Assistance
 - i. Have you worked with any Track A applications? If so, probe on how this experience went.
 - ii. Reservation Request Package:
 - i. How do you gather tenant income information to determine project eligibility?
 - ii. What type of tenant information do you need to collect as a part of this process (ex. meter numbers, etc)? Do you experience any challenges or barriers with this?
 - iii. Who do you work with to gather and verify tenant and/or meter information? Probe for property owner/manager involvement.
 - iv. Does your team have any involvement with tenant ESA Program referrals? *Probe if so.*
 - v. Does your team have any involvement in tenant education?
 - iii. Incentive Claim Package:

- i. Do you anticipate any challenges or barriers related to the interconnection process with the utility? If so, please e
 - d. Have any of your applications been suspended or withdrawn? If so, why? *Probe reasons and barriers.*
 - e. How does this application process compare with other similar programs you've participated in, if you have? *Probe on MASH participation and comparison*
 - f. What about the time the application process takes? **If relevant**, what about the timing from receiving Permission to Operate (PTO) until the incentive is received?
 - g. We understand that Covid-19 has impacted program operations in general, can you describe whether and how this has been the case with your business?
- 9. How do you find out about the status of your application in the program?
 - a. Is there anyone involved with the program who you communicate with on a regular basis?
 - b. How satisfied are you overall with the level of communication around this program? Are there any ways it could be improved?
- 10. We now have some questions about the process of financing SOMAH projects. How do you work with property owners to determine project financing and the most appropriate ownership structure? Could you walk me through the process that your company takes? *Follow up if applicable:*
 - a. What questions or assistance do property owners typically have or need? Do you have insight into what resources they use to understand this process?
 - b. To your knowledge, what is the impact of the incentive level on property owner decisions to participate?
 - i. Do incentive levels seem appropriate?
 - ii. How do the incentive levels impact the property owner's decision regarding the amount of solar that will be allocated to tenant vs. common areas? Is the higher incentive level provided for tenant areas enough to cover the majority of the cost of installation on tenant areas?
 - iii. How do you anticipate the annual incentive step-down affecting projects?
 - c. Does your organization favor one type of ownership model over another? Why is that?
 - i. What % of your projects are PPA vs lease vs host customer owned?
 - ii. Do you provide the capital or project financing, or do you leave it up to the property owner to secure financing?
 - If you acquire the project financing, what type of financing do you acquire (construction loan, etc.)
 - iii. How much of a barrier is financing and access to capital for the property owners you work with? Is this barrier minimized for property owners who choose one ownership type over another?
 - iv. How much of a barrier is financing and access to capital for your organization?
 - v. What are the benefits of the various ownership types property owners? *Probe on different ownership types:*
 - Host-customer owned
 - Solar Lease
 - PPA

- vi. What type of financial information does your organization provide to property owners? (ex. total out of pocket costs, payback period, comparison of costs with various ownership types, etc.)
11. Are you familiar with the SOMAH PA's proposal to break the incentive into a two-payment structure? *(If not familiar: the first payment would be 60% of the total incentive and paid when the system is installed and verified via virtual inspection. The remaining 40% would be paid after the Incentive claim approval).*
 - a. Would this change make it easier for your organization to participate? Why?
 12. Do most of your projects claim the Federal Investment Tax Credit (ITC)? Do any claim the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC)? How, if at all, do either tax credit programs impact the application process and project financial viability?
 - a. Who typically receives the tax credit, your organization or the property owner?
 - b. (If contractor claims ITC) If the credit goes away in 2022, how will that impact your organization's ability to install solar on MF affordable housing?
 - c. Do you recommend taking the Federal ITC to all clients? Why would a project not take advantage of these ITC? (nonprofits can often take advantage of it via a partnership with a for profit organization)?
 - d. How does the program verify whether or not the ITC or LIHTC is being claimed?
 13. Can you describe your experience with program job training requirements? *Prompt if necessary:*
 - a. What is the process of finding and hiring job trainees?
 - b. What support do you receive from the SOMAH PA and/or Job Training Organizations (JTOs)? Is this support sufficient or are there ways this could be improved?
 - c. What is the impact of this requirement on job processes and/or progress, if any?
 - d. Does the job training provided seem sufficient to hire trainees? Have you hired any trainees on to other jobs? Why or why not?
 - e. Does your organization ever sub out any parts of the solar installation to smaller contractors or do you typically use your own staff?
 - f. (If they are a small contractor) Does your organization have a hard time participating due to your size and the other larger solar contractors who are participating in the program?
 14. Are there any other aspects of the program that you're aware of, but which you're not directly involved?
 - a. Do these have any impact on your work and/or timelines?
 - b. Are these aspects that are outside of your control or difficult for your team to influence or address? How do you navigate these aspects?

PROGRAM VALUE AND OVERALL SATISFACTION

15. **[Non-participants only]** Our records show that you **[did not submit a reservation request package/submitted a reservation request package and cancelled it]**. Can you tell me about this decision? *Prompt if necessary:*

- a. Were there obstacles or requirements that made participation unviable for your company? *Probe for as many reasons as possible.*
 - b. How might these issues be addressed?
 - c. In general, how would you suggest improving the program to make it easier for business like yours to participate?
 - d. Do you plan or would you consider participating in the program in the future? Why or why not?
 - e. Is there anything that the program could do or change that would make to want to participate? Please describe.
16. **[Participants only]** How would you rate your satisfaction with the program overall on a scale from 0 (very dissatisfied) to 10 (very satisfied)? *Prompt the following, and ask for reasons for rating:*
- a. Application process overall
 - b. Interactions with the PA
 - c. Program resources and assistance
 - d. Participation timeline
 - e. Incentive payment timeline
17. **[Participants only]** What has the impact of the SOMAH program been on your business so far?
- a. Of the total SOMAH applications your company has submitted, what percent do you think would have moved forward without the program?
18. **[Participants only]** What feedback do you have about the program? Again, we are interested how any parts of the process might be improved (initial upfront technical assistance (if applicable), reservation request application, milestones (Energy Efficiency Compliance and Proof of Project milestones), incentive claim package, on-site inspection, and incentive payment). *Prompt as necessary:*
- a. What is going well/working about the program?
 - b. What isn't working so well?
 - c. What changes would you make to improve it and increase participation?
 - a. In general, how would you suggest improving the program to make it easier for business like yours to participate?
 - b. Does your organization install solar on MF properties outside of SOMAH? How are the SOMAH projects different?
19. Wrap-up: Is there anything we haven't discussed today that you would like to share with me?
20. In your opinion, are there any changes to the program that could or should be made to increase program participation and help ensure that the program is able to successfully meet its goal of installing 300MW of solar in the next 10 years?

Thank you again for participating in this interview! We so appreciate the time you've taken to speak with us to help inform the program in the future.