

FY2019 Call for Community-Scale Solar Project Funding Applications

DEQ-2019RFA-219001

Program Overview

The Montana Solar Community Project (MSCP) is a grant-funded partnership between the Montana Energy Office (MEO) at the Department of Environmental Quality and the U.S. Department of Energy's Solar Energy Technologies Office. The goal of MSCP is to expand Montanans' access to solar photovoltaic (PV) energy solutions through the development of community-scale solar projects throughout the state. MSCP seeks to achieve this goal by:

- Increasing the solar literacy of communities, stakeholders, and community officials.
- Facilitating growth in the Montana solar installer industry by expanding the types of solar PV projects communities are considering.
- Coordinating larger community projects throughout Montana.
- Lowering up-front costs for planning and implementing solar projects.

MSCP is seeking to address the challenge of expanding solar access in Montana by providing funding to reduce the up-front costs for communities and organizations implementing solar PV systems in new and innovative ways that will benefit their communities.

MEO anticipates that approximately \$110,000 in MSCP project funds will be available for distribution between September 2018 and September 2019 to fund potential projects. The recommended range for MSCP funding requests is \$5,000-\$15,000 per project, and a 40% cost share is encouraged, but not required. MEO recognizes that project scale will vary depending upon a variety of factors such as community size, solar project capacity, project engineering requirements, or the amount of organizing or marketing needed within the community. All projects that meet the requirements will be considered, no matter the scale of the project.

Purpose

This Request for Applications (RFA) seeks responses from organizations and individuals in Montana communities interested in organizing and developing community-scale solar projects. MEO will review and rank the applications to select those most appropriate for funding under the criteria set out in this RFA.

Point of Contact

Starting on the issue date (November 30, 2018) of this RFA until successful applicants are selected and announced by MEO, applicants are not allowed to communicate with any Montana state agency staff, officials, or evaluation team members regarding this solicitation, except for Vicki Woodrow. Unauthorized contact may disqualify the applicant from further

consideration. Vicki Woodrow's contact information is: MT DEQ, PO Box 200901, Helena, MT 59620-0901, telephone: 406-444-3101, email: vwoodrow@mt.gov.

Schedule of Events and Term

In contrast to funding rounds 1 and 2, the current Round 3 request for applications, which will be the final solar grant funding opportunity for the Montana Solar Community Project, will have a rolling submission period. All applications will be evaluated on a first come, first evaluated and awarded basis. However, in order to be considered for funding, all applications must be submitted to MEO by either February 8, 2019 or until solar grant funds run out, whichever comes first. All questions submitted to Vicki Woodrow will receive a response via the www.mtsolarcommunity.com/solargrant webpage no later than a week after submission.

Date	Event
December 3, 2018	The application period for Round 3 opens
January 25, 2019	Questions about the application process due to MEO via email to vwoodrow@mt.gov (by 3:00 p.m. local time)
February 1, 2019	MEO responses to all questions will be posted to www.mtsolarcommunity.com/solargrant (by 5:00 p.m. local time)
February 8, 2019	Last day for submission of applications. Applications due to Vicki Woodrow (by 2:00 p.m. local time)
On or before March 1, 2019	Final round of FY2019 project funding selections will be announced

MEO will first review each application for completeness and compliance in accordance with stated submittal instructions. Complete and compliant applications will then be forwarded to the review team. The review team will evaluate each application within three weeks of being received. **All projects that achieve an average a score above the selection threshold, initially set at 120 points, based on the scoring criteria in Appendix A to this document will be awarded funding contracts until grant funds run out.** Grant awards to applications that meet the selection threshold will be allocated based on a first come, first awarded basis.

Applicants whose applications do not meet the selection threshold will be notified that they can revise and resubmit their application for re-evaluation, provided the application deadline of February 8, 2019 has not passed. Once the final application deadline of February 8, 2019 has passed, any remaining applications will be ordered based on their final point score and MEO will award contracts to applicants based on their application ranking, available funding, and a determination of whether a lower award selection threshold is suitable. Funding requests are between \$5,000 and \$15,000, however, MEO reserves the right to adjust the funding amount requested, up or down, based on the project/community solar needs. MEO also reserves the right to lower the selection threshold during this application period. Any applications that were previously below the selection threshold but rose above it with the lowering of the selection threshold will receive a funding contract based on a first come, first awarded basis.

Helpful Resources

The following information may be useful in preparing a project application:

- Montana Solar Menu of Options Report:
http://mtsolarcommunity.com/Portals/185/Documents/MontanaSolarMenuofOptions_final_highres.pdf.
- Montana Solar Resource Maps: <http://mtsolarcommunity.com/Resources>.
- Progress and Potential for Community-Scale Solar:
<https://rmi.org/insights/reports/progress-potential-community-scale-solar/>
- Procuring and Implementing Solar Projects on Public Buildings: How to Avoid Common Pitfalls: <https://www.energy.gov/eere/slsc/downloads/procuring-and-implementing-solar-projects-public-buildings-how-avoid-common>
- Solarize Your Community: An Evidence-Based Guide for Accelerating the Adoption of Residential Solar:
http://cbey.yale.edu/sites/default/files/Solarize%20Your%20Community_Print.pdf

Eligibility Requirements

MEO anticipates receipt of applications from entities as noted below. Due to the nature of the projects, MEO will accept applications from a single entity as well as a “Project Team” that includes more than one entity seeking funding for a combined/shared project.

Project Teams must identify one member of their team to be the Project Sponsor as MEO will only enter into a single contract per project. Applications must identify all project team members and their roles and responsibilities. The entity noted as the Project Sponsor will be responsible for disbursing reimbursed funds from MEO according to the work breakdown established by the application. MEO will only pay invoices submitted by the Project Sponsor.

Applications must also address any subcontracting that may occur in support of the project. Subcontractors, if known, must be included in the application. MEO’s acceptance of the application will indicate approval of those subcontractors. If subcontractors are unknown, portions of the project that are intended to be outsourced must be identified and any subcontracted services must be procured in a competitive manner. MEO is not responsible for payments to subcontractors.

Project sponsors, projects, and applications must meet the following requirements.

Project Sponsor Eligibility: Project sponsors must:

- **Be a governmental entity, non-profit organization, or an electricity provider in Montana.** A governmental entity is a local, state, tribal, or federal office that has been established and authorized by law. Nonprofit organizations are identified as having a tax exempt declaration of 501(c)(3) from the Internal Revenue Service. Electricity providers must be either an investor-owned utility regulated by the Montana Public Service

Commission or an electric cooperative as defined by Title 35, Chapter 18 of the Montana Code Annotated.

- **Be registered with the Montana Secretary of State.** All project sponsors must be registered with the Montana Secretary of State to do business in the state of Montana. Registration with the Secretary of State may be completed via the following website: <http://sos.mt.gov/business/toolkit/index.asp>.
- **Have the necessary liability insurance and be in compliance with the Workers Compensation Act.** Awardees will be required to demonstrate proof of liability insurance and compliance with the Workers Compensation Act prior to being awarded funding. Please contact Vicki Woodrow, (VWoodrow@mt.gov or 406-444-3101) for guidance on the type and level of insurance coverage necessary for your project.

Project Eligibility: All projects must:

- Be for the development of a solar photovoltaic project that provides electricity to a publicly-owned building, or multiple residential, commercial, or industrial buildings. While other project structures are acceptable, three project-types that are definitively eligible are:
 - Planning and development costs related to installing solar at a public or public-serving facility, such as a school, library, university, public utility, or local government administrative building.
 - Planning and development costs related to installing a shared solar array that provides power and/or financial benefit to multiple community members who voluntarily participate in the project by buying or leasing shares of the system.
 - Organizing a community group/bulk purchasing project where multiple homeowners and/or businesses participate in the purchasing and installation of solar PV systems to be installed on their individual properties.
- **Eligible expenses under this RFA include pre-construction costs such as feasibility analysis, engineering, organization and marketing (e.g., Solarize projects), and project administration.**
- Equipment and labor costs associated with the installation of the project **are not eligible** expenses under this RFA. **Expenses incurred before the awarding of a grant are also ineligible.**
- Be able to complete the project within 9 months of awarding of funds and no later than September of 2019.

Application Eligibility

- Applications and required materials must be submitted to Vicki Woodrow, via email at vwoodrow@mt.gov, by 2PM, local time, on 11/9/2018. See Application Materials and Instructions below for more details about submitting a complete application.
- Application must have the appropriate signatures. See the Application Materials and Instructions below for more details on how to submit signatures.

Evaluation Priorities

MEO will evaluate, score, and rank proposed community-scale solar projects using scoring criteria outlined below in DEQ Priorities and Project Competitiveness and Appendix A. The goal of MSCP is to expand Montanans' access to solar energy solutions by increasing solar installation activity in communities that have previously seen little to no community-scale solar development and/or by expanding access to and participation in solar energy projects to socio-economic groups that have previously not been significant participants in the state's solar energy industry. MEO will prioritize funding for proposed community-scale solar projects based on the factors detailed in Appendix A, "Evaluation Criteria Form".

Voluntary Match

MEO is encouraging a minimum voluntary match for eligible community-scale solar projects of 40% of the project costs. The Project Sponsor may provide cost share in the form of cash or in-kind contributions. Cash contributions may be provided by the Project Sponsor or any project subcontractors. Allowable in-kind contributions include, but are not limited to: personnel costs, indirect costs, facilities and administrative costs, rental value of buildings or equipment, and the value of service, other resource, or third party in-kind contributions.

The Project Sponsor is solely responsible for managing cost share contributions by any subcontracting organizations that are part of the Project Team and enforcing cost share obligations assumed by Project Team members in sub-awards or related agreements. Each Project Team is free to determine how best to allocate cost share responsibilities among team members.

Period of Performance

MEO anticipates making awards for projects that will run for a maximum of 9 months in length. Projects planning to extend beyond six months in duration will require a project continuation review at the six-month mark and subsequent funding will be contingent upon satisfactory performance and a go/no-go decision review by MEO. At the go/no-go decision point, MEO will evaluate project performance, project schedule adherence, meeting milestone objectives, compliance with reporting requirements, and overall progress of the project. As a result of this evaluation, MEO will make a determination to continue the project, re-direct the project, or discontinue funding the project.

Application Materials and Instructions

- A. Project Proposal (~35% of proposal): For each project being proposed, the applicant must submit a detailed overview of the proposed work that will be carried out. The project overview should include the following:
 - Background: The applicant should list members of the Project Team and discuss the general background of any organization included in the Project Team, including its

history, successes, and current work within Montana communities. Qualifications of Project members specifically related to the proposed solar project should be detailed in section C of the application (below).

- Project Description and Goals: The applicant should provide a detailed description of the project, including intended results, and any ancillary objectives, like the inclusion of low- and moderate-income households and community education, that will be pursued during the project. This section should describe how the project will expand Montanans' access to the benefits of solar PV energy.
 - Feasibility: The applicant should discuss the feasibility of the proposed project, including a description of previous work results that are relevant to the proposed project.
 - Innovation: The applicant should describe any innovations in community-scale solar development in Montana that the proposed project will deliver. That might be the implementation of a project structure that had previously not been implemented in the proposed community or installing solar on a type of property that had previously not seen significant solar development in the community.
 - Funding Impact: The applicant should discuss the impact that MSCP funding would have on the proposed project. Applicants should specifically explain how MSCP funding will aid the completion of the project.
- B. Project Workplan (~25% of proposal): Each project must provide an outline of the work schedule the project expects to execute to implement its proposed community-scale solar project. The workplan should include the following:
- Task Description Summary: The workplan should describe the timeline for the work to be accomplished including a concise description of the specific tasks to be conducted in each phase of the project.
 - Milestone Summary: The application should provide a summary of appropriate milestones throughout the project to demonstrate success. The milestones should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely (aka SMART). Preferably, there should be at least one milestone per month for the duration of the project. Greater length between milestones is acceptable with an appropriate justification.
 - Go/No-Go Decision Points (necessary only for projects extending beyond six months): For longer projects, the applicant should provide a summary of project-wide go/no-go decision points at appropriate points in the Workplan. The applicant should provide the specific technical criteria to be used to make the go/no-go decision.
 - Project Management: The applicant should discuss the team's proposed management plan, including the roles of each Project Team member.
- C. Qualifications for Conducting the Project (~20% of proposal): Each application should include details about the capabilities and experiences of each member of the Project Team.
- The qualifications section should contain the following information:
 - Describe the Project Team's unique qualifications and expertise related to the proposed solar project, including those of known project subcontractors.
 - Concisely describe the Project Team's relevant previous work efforts and how these enable the applicant to achieve the project objectives.

- Describe the time commitment of the key team members to support the project.
 - Attach letters of commitment from all project subcontractors/third party cost share providers as an appendix. **Letters of commitment do not count towards the page limit.**
 - Attach any letters of support from other project stakeholders or supporters (1 page maximum per letter). **Letters of support do not count towards the page limit.**
- D. Budget Justification (~20% of proposal): Each application must provide a complete budget projection for the project.
- Applicants are required to provide a detailed worksheet outlining the proposed project's budget, including all work expenses to be performed by the Project Sponsor and its project subcontractors.
- E. Application Signature
- The application must be signed by an individual authorized to legally bind that party. The applicant's signature guarantees that the application has been established without collusion and without effort to preclude the State of Montana from obtaining the best possible supply or service. Proof of authority of the person signing the request for application response must be furnished upon request.

DEQ Priorities and Project Competitiveness

Project Goals and Objectives: MSCP's funding from the Department of Energy is intended to help the Montana Energy Office reduce the barriers to solar adoption in Montana and expand Montanans' access to solar energy. As a result, MSCP's priorities for selecting projects to fund through this RFA are:

- Projects that will substantively increase the community's access to solar energy.
- Projects that will expand solar energy access to new socio-economic groups in the community.
- Projects that incorporate opportunities to educate and inform the community about solar energy, both during installation and on an on-going basis.
- Projects that bring innovation in solar energy development to its community.
- Projects that provide additional benefits to the community, such as reducing the operating costs of local public or public-serving buildings, promoting community organizing, or strengthening local skills.

Project Management: Project management is an important component of a successful project. When evaluating project management, MSCP will consider the following:

- The project scope is appropriate and the project is likely to result in the installation of additional solar energy systems in a Montana community.
- Sufficient pre-project planning has taken place to help ensure timely and successful completion of the project.

- The Project Team has the necessary skills and prior experience to successfully implement the project's workplan.
- The Project Team has sufficient technical and managerial resources available to facilitate the successful completion of the project.
- The Project Team has a track record of successfully completing projects on time and within budget.

Project Methods: MSCP is seeking to expand Montanans' long-term access to solar energy. Some methods lead to more lasting results, have a more favorable cost/benefit ratio, or may be better suited to certain communities. When evaluating project methods, MSCP will consider the following:

- The project has identified additional funding resources to meet at least 40% of the project's planning expenses.
- Project costs are reasonable as compared to anticipated results.
- The project promotes solar energy development that will encourage further solar energy growth in the future.
- Outreach and education components target the most appropriate audiences.
- The project's ratio of potential installed solar capacity to Montana Solar Community Project requested funds is high.
- MSCP funding is necessary to initiate the project.

When and How to Apply for Funding

Application Process: A full application must be submitted before the deadline noted above (February 8, 2019) in order to be evaluated and ranked for funding by MEO. However, applications will be accepted beginning December 3, 2018 and will be evaluated and awarded on a rolling basis. This RFA is being published for public access on the following website: www.mtsolarcommunity.com/solargrant. All application materials must be accessed via the website. Please note that this website will also be used to provide answers to questions and publish the list of approved Applicants. It is the Applicant's responsibility to check this website in accordance with the dates noted above to ensure they have all information required to complete their application. MEO will not review or consider submissions that do not meet the eligibility requirements listed above in Eligibility Requirements as well as the application requirements listed in Application Materials and Instructions. All submissions must conform to the listed content requirements, including maximum page lengths.

Applicants will have an opportunity to submit questions to MEO regarding both the RFA and the model contract. Applicant must notify DEQ of any ambiguity, inconsistency, unduly restrictive specifications, or error that they discover in the RFA. In this notice, the Applicant shall include any specifics within the RFA that preclude the Applicant from responding or add unnecessary cost. Applicant shall provide an explanation and provide suggested modifications. Applicant requests for additions or exceptions to the contract terms must include an explanation why the exception is being sought and what specific effect it will have on the Applicant's ability to

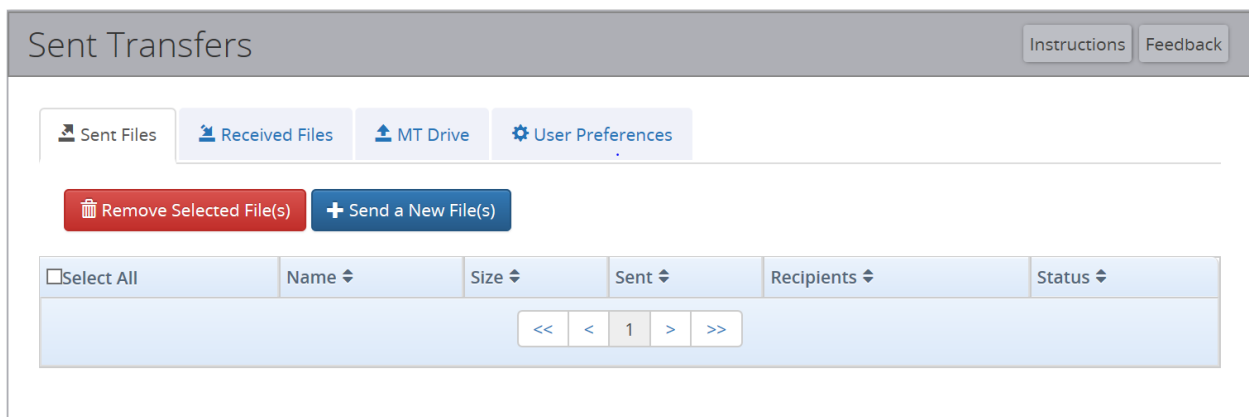
respond to the RFA or perform the contract. The State reserves the right to address nonmaterial requests for exceptions to the contract language with the highest-ranking Applicants during the contract refinement process.

Questions must be submitted via email to Vicki Woodrow no later than **3:00 p.m. local time on January 25, 2019**. Questions received after the deadline may not be considered. MEO will publish answers to questions received by the stated due date/time of **5:00 p.m. local time on February 1, 2019**. DEQ answers that change any specifics of the RFA or model contract will be considered binding. Any other form of interpretation, correction, or change to this RFA or contract terms and conditions will not be binding upon the State. It is Applicant’s responsibility to check the website noted above to review the answers, particularly if answers changed the RFA or model contract.

Responses submitted via email must be no more than 10 MB in size. If your response will exceed that size, you may submit your response via the State’s File Transfer Services. To access the service visit the following website and click on the “Create an Account” tab:

<https://transfer.mt.gov/Home/Login?EPassError=Unauthorized&ErrorCode=Unauthorized&ErrorMessage=You%20do%20not%20have%20access%20to%20the%20requested%20resource.&ReturnUrl=https%3a%2f%2fttransfer.mt.gov%2f>.

Once you’ve created your ePass account you may need to sign in again to the service. If that step is not necessary you will transition straight to the service. Following is the webpage you will see:



Click on the “Send a New File(s)” tab to begin the process of uploading documents. When asked for the email documents should be sent to enter vwoodrow@mt.gov. Please note that only 10 documents may be sent at a time and they must be files; the services will not upload a folder.

Upon successfully submitting an application, Vicki Woodrow will email the applicant a response, confirming that MEO has received the application. Please consider trying to submit your applications sufficiently ahead of the deadline to allow the failure of receiving an application receipt confirmation email to occur before the deadline has passed. MEO is not responsible for unsuccessful submissions of project applications.

MEO will not extend the application submittal deadline unless material changes are deemed necessary through responses during the Q&A period. Each application must conform to the following requirements:

- Each must be submitted in Adobe PDF format unless stated otherwise.
- Each must be written in English.
- All pages must be formatted to fit on 8.5 x 11 inch paper with margins not less than one inch on every side.
- Each submission must not exceed the 12 pages, including cover page, charts, graphs, maps, and photographs when printed using the formatting requirements set forth above. **Additional attachments, such as letter of support or commitment do not count toward the 12 page limit.** If the applicants exceed the maximum page length, MEO will review only the authorized number of pages and disregard any additional pages.

All applications that pass the initial eligibility review will be evaluated according to the criteria identified in Appendix A.

DEQ Review of Projects and Applications

Applications will be reviewed and evaluated by MEO within three weeks of being received and no later than the week of February 25, 2019 in Helena. The panel will be comprised of Montana Department of Environmental Quality's Energy Office staff who are subject matter experts in renewable energy. A scoring sheet will be used during the evaluation process and is included as Attachment A. The scoring sheet reflects MEO's priorities for funding community-scale solar projects through MSCP. The scoring sheet and the composite scores from the review team will be used by MEO to rank the projects by their funding priority.

Contracting Requirements

Funds will be disbursed through cost reimbursable contracts that identify the specifics of the project that must be completed prior to receiving reimbursement. A copy of the model contract can be found at www.mtsolarcommunity.com/solargrant . Applicant requests for additions or exceptions to the contract terms and conditions must be provided as part of the Q&A period and must include an explanation why the exception is being sought and what specific effect it will have on the offeror's ability to respond to the RFA or perform the contract. MEO reserves the right to address nonmaterial requests for exceptions to the contract terms and conditions with each Applicant during the contract refinement process.

Cost Share (Match): Project Sponsors are encouraged to meet a 40% cost share (also known as match) for the project. Match can be from private, state, local, or non-profit sources, it cannot be from federal sources.

Contract Lifecycle: Contracts will be awarded within three weeks of the successful submission of an application that scores above the scoring threshold. Projects are required to be completed

within 9 months of the date the contract is signed. Contract execution is the Project Sponsor's notice to proceed. **Any expenses incurred by project team members prior to contract execution will not be reimbursed. Likewise, Applicant's match must also conform to the contract term dates.**

Reporting Requirements and Payment Requests: Payment requests are on a reimbursement basis only. The Project Sponsor shall request payment no more frequently than monthly and no less frequently than quarterly. With each payment request, the Project Sponsor is required to submit a report that includes a description of the work completed, justification for expenses incurred, work expected to be completed before the next payment request, and any additional challenges or opportunities that arose during the reporting period or are expected during the next reporting period. At a minimum, the Project Sponsor must submit quarterly reports and a final report.

Appendix A – FY2019 Montana Community-Scale Solar

Project Name: _____

Project Sponsor: _____

Reviewed By: _____

General Application Considerations		Score* (0-4)	Weight	Points Awarded **
A	Project Goals and Objectives			
A1	The project will substantively increase the community's access to solar energy		4	
A2	The project will increase solar energy access to new socio-economic groups in the community		4	
A3	The project incorporates opportunities to educate and inform the community about solar energy		3	
A4	The project brings innovation in solar energy development to its community		3	
A5	The project provides additional benefits to the community (i.e., reducing the operating costs of local public or public-serving buildings, providing job training, etc.)		3	
B	Project Management			
B1	The project scope is appropriate and project is likely to result in the installation of additional solar energy systems in a Montana community		4	
B2	Pre-project planning has been initiated and the project has clearly identified the tasks to be completed		3	
B3	The Project Team has identified likely solar energy development locations and/or project participants		3	
B4	Sufficient technical and managerial resources are available to facilitate the successful completion of the project		3	
B5	The Project Team has a track record of successfully completing projects on time and within budget		4	
C	Project Methods			
C1	The project has identified additional funding resources to meet at least 40% of the project's planning expenses.		4	
C2	Estimated project expenses are reasonable and justified		4	
C3	The project promotes solar energy development that will encourage further solar energy growth in the future		3	
C4	The project's ratio of potential installed solar capacity to Montana Solar Community Project requested funds is high		3	
C5	Outreach and education components target the most appropriate audiences		3	
C6	Montana Solar Community Project funding is necessary to initiate the project		2	
Total Score				

* In awarding points to the evaluation criteria, the evaluator/evaluation committee will consider the following guidelines:

4 – Superior Response: A superior response is an exceptional reply that completely and comprehensively meets all of the requirements of the RFA. In addition, the response may cover areas not originally addressed

within the RFA and/or include additional information and recommendations that would prove both valuable and beneficial to the agency.

3 – Good Response: A good response clearly meets all the requirements of the RFA and demonstrates in an unambiguous and concise manner a thorough knowledge and understanding of the project, with no deficiencies noted.

2 – Fair Response: A fair response minimally meets most requirements set forth in the RFA. The Applicant demonstrates some ability to comply with guidelines and requirements of the project, but knowledge of the subject matter is limited.

1 – Failed Response: A failed response does not meet the requirements set forth in the RFA. The Applicant has not demonstrated sufficient knowledge of the subject matter.

0 – No Response: A score of 0 indicates the application does not address the question.

**To calculate Points Awarded, multiply the Score by the Weight Factor (i.e. $3 * 4 = 12$ points awarded)