

Energy Improvements in Rural or Remote Areas
REQUEST FOR INFORMATION (RFI)
(DE-FOA-0002841_RFI)

ISSUE DATE: OCTOBER 4, 2022

RESPONSES DUE: **December 5, 2022**

SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR INFORMATION **Modification 0001**

Modification:

All modifications to the RFI are **[HIGHLIGHTED]** in the body of the RFI.

Mod. No.	Date	Description of Modification
0001	11/16/22	1. Extended RFI submission deadline to December 5, 2022.

Description

This is a Request for Information (RFI) issued by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Office of Clean Energy Demonstrations (OCED).¹ This RFI seeks public input to help inform DOE's program implementation strategies and funding processes to support energy improvements in rural or remote areas, in accordance with the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), also commonly known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL).² The BIL is a once-in-a-generation investment in infrastructure, which provides the backbone for a more sustainable, resilient, and equitable economy through enhancing U.S. competitiveness, diversifying regional economies to include supply chain and manufacturing industries, creating good-paying union jobs, and ensuring stronger access to economic and other benefits for underserved communities.

Section 40103(c) of the BIL authorizes DOE to carry out activities to fund energy improvement in rural or remote areas of the United States. The BIL appropriates \$1 billion to OCED for the five-year period encompassing fiscal years (FYs) 2022 through 2026 to improve in rural or remote areas of the United States the resilience, safety, reliability, and availability of energy and environmental protection from adverse impacts of energy generation.³ The term "rural or remote area" is defined by the BIL as a city, town, or unincorporated area that has a population of not more than 10,000 inhabitants. OCED intends to implement these activities as the Energy Improvements in Rural or Remote Areas (ERA) Program.

To help inform DOE's implementation of the ERA Program, this RFI seeks input on:

- Outcomes the program should seek to deliver for residents of rural or remote areas, and the types of innovative energy projects that achieve those outcomes and meet the authorization language
- Considerations that could impact programmatic design or strategy
- Community benefits, including energy and environmental justice (EEJ), diversity, equity inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) considerations; and quality jobs, and
- Ways to broadly share knowledge gained and impacts.

¹ This is a Request for Information (RFI) only. OCED will not pay for information provided under this RFI and no project will be supported as a result of this RFI. This RFI is not accepting applications for financial assistance or financial incentives. OCED may or may not issue a Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) based on consideration of the input received from this RFI.

² Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, Public Law 117-58 (November 15, 2021).

³ Public Law 117-58, Div. D, Title I, § 40103(c), Nov. 15, 2021.

Responses to this RFI will be used by DOE for planning purposes to develop the ERA Program, which may include the use of Technical Assistance, Prizes, Funding Opportunity Announcements (FOA), Other Transactional Authorities (OTAs), or Partnership Intermediary Agreements (PIAs). The information collected will not be published.

Background

On November 15, 2021, President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. signed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (Public Law 117-58), also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). The BIL appropriates more than \$62 billion to DOE to ensure the clean energy future delivers true economic prosperity to the American people by:

- Investing in American manufacturing and workers by creating good-paying jobs with the free and fair chance to join a union, and supporting workforce development that enables workers to advance in their careers.
- Expanding access to energy efficiency and clean energy for families, communities, and businesses.
- Delivering reliable, clean, and affordable power to more Americans.
- Building the technologies of tomorrow through clean energy demonstrations.

The ERA Program may provide support using a number of mechanisms and tools to rural or remote areas for the purpose of:

- A. improving the overall cost-effectiveness of energy generation, transmission, or distribution systems;
- B. siting or upgrading transmission and distribution lines;
- C. reducing greenhouse gas emissions from energy generation by rural or remote areas;
- D. providing or modernizing electric generation facilities;
- E. developing microgrids; and
- F. increasing energy efficiency.

Principles of equity and justice will guide implementation of this program, consistent with the Biden Administration's commitments to ensure that overburdened, underserved, and underrepresented individuals and communities have access to federal resources. ERA Program implementation efforts will follow the Biden Administration's objective that 40 percent of the overall benefits from Federal investments in climate, clean energy, and related job training and workforce development, and other investments flow to disadvantaged communities. ERA investments should not exacerbate existing inequalities, such as disproportionate exposure to environmental hazards and harms. The ERA program will work to advance equity for all, including people of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality. Strengthening prosperity – by expanding good-paying, safe union jobs and supporting job growth through investments in domestic manufacturing and supply chains – is a key goal set by President

Biden.⁴ The ERA Program will support jobs with the free and fair choice to join a union, the incorporation of strong labor standards, and workforce development.^{5,6}

DOE's OCED is administering the ERA Program. OCED's mission is to deliver clean energy technology demonstration projects at scale in partnership with the private sector to accelerate deployment, market adoption, and the equitable transition to a decarbonized energy system. OCED was established in December 2021 and was first authorized and funded through the BIL. The founding of OCED builds on DOE's expertise in clean energy research and development and expands DOE's scope to fill a critical gap on the path to net-zero emissions by 2050.

Program Goals

The overall goal of the ERA Program is to demonstrate innovative and replicable approaches to improve the resilience, safety, reliability, and availability of, and reduce the adverse impacts from, energy generation by rural or remote areas.⁷ The program will seek to deliver these outcomes for rural and remote communities through support for projects that can be scaled and/or have accelerated market adoption to advance the equitable transition to a decarbonized energy system across the country. Accomplishing these goals requires focusing on community and worker needs, forging trusting partnerships between rural or remote communities and energy project partners, and facilitating lasting connections between communities to help each other with similar energy challenges. To maintain a focus on community and worker needs, justice, and equity, the ERA Program will:

- Address the energy and environmental needs (including access to affordable, resilient, clean energy supply) of rural or remote communities;
- Facilitate forming effective and trusting project partnerships – between communities with similar energy challenges, with DOE and other agencies, and with the energy project partners required for successful implementation; and
- Consider the capacity of project teams, including communities and other relevant partners, to participate in the program, before, during, and after receipt of funding and ability to access technical assistance necessary to identify and address energy needs.

In addition to the goal of accelerating the equitable transition to a decarbonized energy system for rural and remote communities through financial assistance or other mechanisms that will be awarded under the ERA Program, it is important to also accelerate market adoption of technologies and solutions to benefit rural or remote areas beyond those participating in the ERA Program. This can happen through replication of successful solutions demonstrated throughout this program. Achieving replicability requires that real or perceived barriers to installing and operating energy projects in rural or remote communities are mitigated. As such, the program seeks to build

⁴ See Executive Orders (EOs) on Ensuring the Future Is Made in All of America by All of America's Workers (EO 14005), Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad (EO 14008), Worker Organizing and Empowerment (EO 14025), Promoting Competition in the American Economy (EO 14036), and Implementing the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (EO 14052).

⁵ Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAPs) are a proven model of job preparation, registered by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) or a DOL-recognized State Apprenticeship Agency (SAA), which employ workers and combine paid On-the-Job Learning (OJL) (also referred to as On-the-Job Training (OJT)) with Related Instruction (RI) to progressively increase workers' skill levels and wages. RAPs are also a business-driven model that provide an effective way for employers to recruit, train, and retain highly skilled workers. RAPs allow workforce partners, educators, and employers to develop and apply industry standards to training programs, thereby increasing the quality of the workforce and workforce productivity. RAPs offer job seekers immediate employment opportunities that pay sustainable wages and offer advancement along a career path as they complete their training. Registered Apprentice completers receive industry-recognized certificates of completion leading to long-term career opportunities. For more information on RAPs, please visit www.apprenticeship.gov.

⁶ The U.S. Department of Labor has developed a framework for Quality Pre-Apprenticeship Programs. For additional information on pre-apprenticeship, please review USDOL's Training and Employment Notice 13-12.

⁷ Rural or remote areas are defined by statute as cities, towns or unincorporated areas that has a population of not more than 10,000 inhabitants. Projects must satisfy this definition to be applicable.

confidence of decision makers, such as financiers, utilities, and tribal, state, and local governments, who would enable replication.

DOE is intent on delivering a set of energy outcomes for rural and remote communities while demonstrating innovative approaches or projects that can achieve those outcomes. This can include a project or approach that applies established technologies for the first time in a new setting or place or at a larger scale, uses an innovative approach to siting and permitting, demonstrates a new business model approach for energy access or reduction in environmental harm from generation, demonstrates an innovative technology, among other concepts. Projects that may not be considered innovative in one community could be considered innovative in another if it is that community's or utility's first time deploying that type of technology or deploying it at a larger scale (e.g., community solar, DERs, etc.). Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Business model risk mitigation, such as demonstrating projected revenue and operations and maintenance costs, or that financing or aggregating projects in certain ways sufficiently hedges financial risk.
- Decision-making process risk mitigation, such as demonstrating innovative participatory planning approaches that accelerate community consensus-building and technology deployment.
- Workforce risk mitigation, such as demonstrating novel engagements with labor organization or training programs for workers in rural or remote communities to operate and maintain specific types of projects that have not historically been present in their communities.
- Community impact risk mitigation, such as demonstrating greenhouse gas and criteria pollutant emission prevention strategies, especially for communities of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality.
- Regulatory risk mitigation, such as demonstrating new siting, permitting, ratemaking, or cost-allocation processes.
- Operational risk mitigation, such as demonstrating effective strategies for integrating novel technologies with existing electric grids.
- Technology risk mitigation, such as demonstrating use of near-commercial technologies or deployment of commercial technologies in new environments or at a new scale where performance has not previously been validated.

Draft Strategy for Implementation of the ERA Program

This section provides a high-level draft plan for DOE's current vision to meet BIL Section 40103(c) requirements. It represents DOE's preliminary considerations and is likely to change as DOE gathers feedback. The strategy includes activities that will inform (1) programmatic design through stakeholder engagement and foundational analysis; (2) competitive funding opportunities that support demonstration projects; (3) approaches to technical assistance to support stakeholders and projects; and (4) ways to ensure enduring programmatic impacts.

In lieu of or in addition to providing written responses to this RFI, respondents may request a 30-minute individual unrecorded discussion with a DOE staff member regarding the content of their written responses to the RFI questions. More information is found on page 12 of this document.

1. Shaping the Programmatic Design

Stakeholder Engagement: OCED is planning an initial series of in-person and virtual stakeholder workshops and listening sessions in Fall 2022. These workshops will seek feedback from a broad range of stakeholders including disadvantaged communities, Tribal Nations, the clean energy industry and its investors, federal and state regulatory agencies, state and local governments, labor

unions and workforce training organizations, environmental justice and energy justice organizations, community-based organizations, economic development organizations, conservation and environmental groups, and academic and other research institutions. These workshops will collect region- and domain-specific perspectives on the challenges and opportunities of energy demonstration in rural or remote communities. These events will supplement the input sought from this RFI. OCED plans to solicit feedback from these groups throughout the lifetime of the ERA program.

Foundational Analyses: OCED will work with national laboratory partners to gather relevant data and conduct analyses of existing energy programs in rural and remote areas. These analyses will help OCED categorize and understand the highest impact energy system needs for rural and remote communities, learn from past energy deployment and demonstration projects, and better understand the national landscape for energy improvements and the need for demonstrations in rural or remote communities – ultimately ensuring better program execution. This also will include publication of analysis produced by the labs, providing publicly available GIS mapping of eligible areas and other key parameters, and ultimately publication of project and approach validation.

Coordinating Government Resources: Recognizing that rural and remote community energy projects are eligible for other sources of Federal financial support, OCED will work with interagency partners to scope the appropriate role of the ERA financial assistance or other mechanisms used within the broader set of available federal resources. In some instances, potential ERA projects may be more appropriately supported by, or in conjunction with other federal programs. In other instances, one source of federal support may preclude a project from benefiting from other sources of federal support. To optimize the awarding of ERA funding, OCED will work with U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Department of the Interior, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Commerce, and the DOE Loan Programs Office to develop a resource guide for potential applicants to consider when seeking federal support. OCED will also work with these entities to ensure the insights gained through ERA investments have enduring impacts for other federal programs.

2. Future Potential Funding Opportunities: Prizes, Grants and Cooperative Agreements, Other Transaction Authority, and/or Partnership Intermediary Agreements

Prize Competitions: OCED may also use one or more prize competitions to address barriers to entry by communities and project partners. Prizes are a unique mechanism that allows for a pay-for-performance model and offers a lower barrier to entry for competitors. This lower barrier of entry may be well suited for entities receiving funding from the Federal Government for the first time. These prize competitions may solicit new ideas for investing in business models for rural and remote demonstration projects, identify new ways of working with partners supporting communities readying for demonstration of systems, and other key gaps as identified by the program in supporting the goals of the provision. Ultimately, the goal of prizes offered as part of the ERA program will build organizational capacity to do demonstration projects and enhance relationships between entities required for successful demonstration projects in rural or remote areas, including communities, utilities, private capital, project developers, and DOE. Prize competitions would be administered under 15 U.S.C § 3719.

Grants and Cooperative Agreements: OCED envisions that the projects funded under the ERA Program could be selected through multiple financial assistance mechanisms, such as Funding Opportunity Announcements (FOAs). Successful applicants would enter into cooperative agreements or grants with DOE. DOE will work to ensure that these models of funding will serve the needs of a wide and diverse set of stakeholders. It is envisioned that projects funded under financial assistance awards would be 3-5 years in length, cost shared with public-private funding, and managed through

four distinct phases: project development, design, construction, and operations. Grants and cooperative agreements would be administered under 2 CFR 200 and 2 CFR 910.

Other Transactions Authority (OTA) and Partnership Intermediary Agreements (PIA): OCED envisions exploring the use of OTAs and PIAs to provide support and distribute widespread impacts to rural and remote communities through capacity building at the local and regional level. This could include supporting project development from concept stage, feasibility, and risk assessments, planning and design through construction and operations. The use of OTAs and PIAs could support organizations who work with multiple projects, either on a regional or topical (i.e., technological) basis to share learnings across a cohort of projects and communities. Working with intermediaries could mean reducing burden on individual community projects on reporting, facilitating federal financial reporting, streamlining acquisition of technologies through aggregation of projects, and other benefits. OTA and PIA would be administered under 42 U.S.C. § 7256 or 15 U.S.C. 3715.

3. Technical Assistance

Technical Assistance: DOE may provide multiple types of technical assistance to enable entities to evaluate and develop initial concepts, address risks, and support selected projects. For example, DOE is partnering with the Environmental Protection Agency on the creation of the *Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Centers*, which will provide services to rural or remote communities in support of this program.⁸ Additionally, DOE is considering leveraging technical assistance with other agencies as well, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture under an existing Memorandum of Understanding. DOE will leverage its national laboratories in support of technical assistance.

The technical assistance activities offered under the ERA Program may include but are not limited to:

- Assessing the potential for clean energy
- Assessing permitting and siting needs
- Assessing the needed interconnection, transmission, and other grid components
- Assessing system design and operational risk
- Validation of system configuration and technology selection
- Providing measurement, reporting, and validation support to awardees
- Environmental monitoring, evaluation, and assessment
- Identifying and analyzing financing options for pursuing projects, including partnership opportunities
- Providing capacity-building support to enable effective engagement with private sector entities on community benefits, including environmental and energy justice, quality jobs, and other matters
- Assessing whether existing workforce training and incumbent worker skills match with clean energy demonstration activities, and
- Cybersecurity plan review.

4. Ensuring Enduring Programmatic Impacts

Measurement and Validation: Measurement and validation will be performed during the demonstration projects. Validation of the environmental and energy gains of any demonstration, and the impact on rural and remote areas, is needed to provide evidence of success and promote future replication. While this may be provided as technical assistance or through other means, ensuring

⁸ For more information: <https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/environmental-justice-thriving-communities-technical-assistance-centers>

both validation of performance and transparent publication of results will be critical to the future success of the Program.

Creating Connections Between Rural and Remote Areas: In addition to providing technical and financial assistance, OCED recognizes that it will be important to create connections among projects funded through the ERA Program and interested stakeholders to increase impacts and extend benefits to communities not directly funded through the ERA Program. This may include convening summits for demonstration project awardees and interested stakeholders, creating networking events and activities to encourage collaboration, and having projects funded by OCED share lessons learned and collaborate during their project design and implementation. OCED wants to determine the best ways to facilitate lessons learned from projects funded through the ERA Program, as well as inform and support areas that are considering improvements in their energy infrastructure outside of ERA Program funding.

Purpose

The purpose of this RFI is to solicit feedback on topics such as rural and remote clean energy needs and opportunities, optimal clean energy outcomes, barriers, stakeholder engagement, community benefits, and financing mechanisms that will inform the structure, strategy, and execution of the ERA Program. DOE is seeking feedback from respondents that include, but are not limited to, the clean energy industry and its investors, residents of rural or remote areas, commercial and industrial energy users in rural or remote areas, federal and state regulatory agencies, tribal governments, state and local governments, labor unions and workforce training organizations, environmental justice and energy justice organizations, American Indian Tribes and Alaska Native Villages and other tribal organizations, community-based organizations, economic development organizations, conservation and environmental groups, and academic and other research institutions.

DOE recognizes that many rural or remote areas may face barriers to carrying out demonstration projects, ranging from project identification and application submission to implementation and ongoing operations and maintenance after federal involvement ends. While DOE and other federal agencies have previously sought input on these barriers and are actively working to implement recommendations received,⁹ DOE seeks additional insights on previous experience working with the Federal Government as they pertain to the ERA Program. DOE also is interested in information on how demonstration programs can be implemented to stimulate follow-on investments and improve the resilience, safety, reliability, and availability of energy; promote energy and environmental justice; and improve environmental protection from adverse impacts of energy generation.

This is solely a request for information and not a Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA), Prize, or other funding mechanism. DOE is not accepting project applications via this RFI. Please be advised that responses to this RFI are subject to disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

Request for Information Categories and Questions

The questions in this RFI are grouped into five categories. Respondents are invited to respond to as many or as few of the questions as they wish and should prioritize areas most relevant to their own interests and expertise. In lieu of or in addition to providing written responses to this RFI, respondents may request a 30-minute individual unrecorded discussion with a DOE staff member regarding the content of their written responses to the RFI questions.

⁹ Some recent DOE examples include: Inclusive Energy Innovation RFI Report: [Summary: Responses to the Request for Information on Inclusive Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Climate Technology | Department of Energy](#); Equitable Demonstration and Deployment Roundtable Report <https://www.nrel.gov/docs/fy22osti/81593.pdf>

The first category is to help OCED understand respondent type. The second category is for communities or partners who have projects they believe to be aligned with the provision to detail the opportunities and challenges associated with potential projects. The third category is shaped for broader feedback on key design considerations for ERA from communities, state, regional, or other organizations to articulate general challenges and opportunities on program strategy. And there is a fourth category for open comments. Organizations can apply to some or all of the questions in these sections.

- Category 1: Respondent Characteristics
- Category 2: Potential Project Details
- Category 3: Program Structure
- Category 4: Open

Category 1: Respondent Characteristics

Respondent Characteristics:

- 1.1 What type of organization do you represent, or are you responding as a private citizen? To help DOE categorize responses, please use one of the following respondent classifications: private citizen, government, community-based organization, labor union, energy provider, American Indian Tribe and Alaska Native Village, or other tribal organization, for-profit company, other type of non-profit entity, or other. If other, please specify.
- 1.2 What role would you or your organization play in an energy project conducted through this program?

Category 2: Potential Project Details

Section 40103(c) of the BIL provides that federal support, including financial assistance to rural or remote areas, may be provided for the purpose of:

- A. Improving the overall cost-effectiveness of energy generation, transmission, or distribution systems;
- B. siting or upgrading transmission and distribution lines;
- C. reducing greenhouse gas emissions from energy generation by rural or remote areas;
- D. providing or modernizing electric generation facilities;
- E. developing microgrids; and
- F. increasing energy efficiency.

Questions in this category relate to understanding the types of projects that would fit within these purposes.

Area Definition:

- 2.1 In Section 40103(c), “rural or remote area” is defined as a city, town, or unincorporated area that has a population of not more than 10,000 inhabitants. Would you characterize the area you represent or have in mind regarding this program as being rural or remote? If so, why? If you are considering many areas (e.g., as a governmental body or non-profit), what characteristics would be indicative of communities fitting this definition?
- 2.2 Would you characterize this area as underserved, overburdened, disadvantaged, or as having environmental justice concerns? If so, why and with what metrics? In what ways, if any, does being rural or remote shape these challenges?
- 2.3 What, if any, energy challenges does the rural or remote area have? What are the community’s priorities among these challenges? Has the area considered specific solutions and, if so, what progress has been made to implement the solutions? Answers can cover

both a specific community you represent as well as broader categories or types of relevant communities.

Project Priorities:

- 2.4 Given the purposes referenced above (bullets A-F), what types of energy projects would be most impactful?
- 2.5 Would this type of project(s) address energy burdens, economic burdens, environmental impacts, lack of quality jobs, or other energy equity and environmental justice considerations? If so, how?
- 2.6 What barriers have been encountered or would be anticipated for these types of projects or relevant analogs? What are potential paths to overcoming them? Provide specific examples of the types of barriers of interest in the categories of permitting, financing, community engagement, materials acquisition and construction, and operations and maintenance.
- 2.7 What would equitable and meaningful community involvement look like for this type of energy project(s)? How can you incorporate perspectives from groups within the community who experience disproportionate socio-economic, environmental, political, or energy burdens? What support is needed to build equitable community engagement?

Project Size:

- 2.8 For projects conducted within the community area in the past or that are being planned, what is the approximate size (e.g., measured in dollars, power rating, geographic benefit)? What size projects could this rural or remote area support in the future? Are there approaches to make projects scalable for future community needs?
- 2.9 How long would an envisioned project take to go from concept to operation?
- 2.10 Is this project in the review or design stage, or is it ready to build? How do you assess readiness of the project?
- 2.11 Demonstration projects through DOE typically require a 50% cost share, in other words a minimum 1:1 match of private sector to federal funds. Do you anticipate challenges for a 50% cost share requirement?

Project Staffing and Long-term Sustainability:

- 2.12 Is your organization sufficiently staffed to develop a DOE funding application and, if awarded, manage the project? If not, what support could DOE or other organizations provide to enable your participation in the program?
- 2.13 Do you have existing partners to aid in funding applications and project management? If not, what could DOE do to facilitate these relationships?
- 2.14 Would you anticipate any challenges in operating or maintaining the energy project? These challenges could include factors such as hiring and retaining staff and long-term business models to ensure funding is available for operations and maintenance.
- 2.15 Diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) is a priority for OCED-funded projects. If your organization already has a DEIA plan, what challenges, if any, do you face in fully realizing this plan? If not, what support do you need to create and carry out a DEIA plan?

Community Benefits Planning

- 2.16 Which entities would need to be involved in these energy projects for them to be successful? Please describe the roles of these entities.
- 2.17 What barriers exist for forming or strengthening relationships with any critical project partners for these demonstrations?
- 2.18 Do you work with any regional or other partners you believe that would strengthen your ability to participate in this program?

- 2.19 What potential impacts, positive or negative, could result from the type of energy projects over the full life of the project? What factors might influence how those impacts are distributed?

Outcomes and Replicability:

- 2.20 What outcomes would the organization you represent prioritize for an energy project? What metrics would be appropriate to convey these outcomes?
- 2.21 What attributes of the project(s) need to be demonstrated to support their replication for follow-on deployments? Example factors affecting replication could include attributes such as geographic context, business model, regulatory or permitting, community or ownership structure, or other contextual factors.
- 2.22 What are the key performance metrics or measures your organization would need insight about to have confidence in the technology, business model, or other elements of project structure and replicability?

Category 3: Program Structure

In addition to seeking information on the types of projects and attributes of communities that may seek assistance through this provision, OCED is seeking feedback and additional information on the structure of the Program, including the role of partners, states, and other organizations in supporting improvements in rural and remote areas.

Program Design

OCED recognizes the need for engagement, partnerships, financing access, and key outcome metrics as critical elements in its program design. These questions are specifically seeking local, regional, state, or national considerations for OCED to consider in finalizing program design.

Stakeholder Engagement: Stakeholder engagement is key for rural or remote areas. OCED is seeking feedback on gaps and opportunities to increase enhanced awareness on reaching these areas.

- 3.1 Are there best practices OCED should consider for engaging with rural or remote stakeholders?
- 3.2 Are there partners OCED should work with to engage with rural or remote areas in support of stakeholder engagement?

Community Readiness: While previous sections sought to detail projects ready for demonstrations, there are still gaps that exist in areas that may need additional support for these types of projects.

- 3.3 Are there any communities or entities that would struggle to or lack capacity to participate in the program, and how should OCED consider any additional resources to help these communities?

Partnerships: Whether through direct federal partnerships or with local, state, regional, nonprofit, or for profit organizations could make projects successful. OCED is seeking more information on current partnerships or potential future partnerships to make these projects successful broadly.

- 3.4 Are there any considerations OCED should consider in the design of the program to incorporate challenges for communities not ready for a demonstration program? Are there partners who can help work alongside these communities?
- 3.5 What existing Federal, Regional, and or State entities that are already engaging in rural and remote communities should OCED leverage?
- 3.6 What other partnerships or models could be useful for OCED to consider in advancing projects through this provision?
- 3.7 Are there agencies or state-level organizations OCED should work with on implementation?

Financing: Access to capital for demonstration projects, as well as follow-on funding for project fulfillment will be critical for areas considering this funding. This could include attracting public and private sector capital for improvements in areas supported through ERA.

- 3.8 How can OCED design the ERA Program to unlock other, non-Federal sources of capital for rural and remote energy projects?
- 3.9 What existing Federal, Regional, and or State entities that are already engaging in rural and remote communities should OCED leverage?
- 3.10 How can OCED design the ERA Program to best complement other Federal assistance for rural or remote energy projects?
- 3.11 What are some of the broad challenges to accessing cost share that could be realized through this provision?

Competitive Solicitations:

OCED may use several potential financial mechanisms and support programs to provide assistance to applicants and stakeholders.

Prize Competitions: As mechanism to reach new people, audiences, and communities, OCED is considering the use of prize competitions. This could include activities to build capacity and relationships between entities required for successful demonstration projects in rural or remote areas, including communities, utilities, private capital, project developers, and DOE; providing seed funding for new investment models or companies; or identifying and developing solutions to help address other challenges.

- 3.12 Are there any key considerations OCED should keep in mind while shaping prize competitions?
- 3.13 Are there areas that you believe would be well suited for a prize competition?

Grants and Cooperative Agreements: It is envisioned that OCED will fund demonstration projects, and help to facilitate projects through planning, design, construction, and operation. Potential evaluation criteria will include replicability potential; improvements to resilience, safety, reliability, and availability of energy; environmental protections from adverse impacts of energy generation; and other criteria that reflect the BIL priorities.

- 3.14 DOE intends to release multiple competitive solicitations over the duration of the ERA Program. Are there specific timing considerations of which DOE should be aware in releasing solicitations? For example, amount of time respondents need, timing within the calendar year, or reoccurrence during FY22-FY26?
- 3.15 OCED is considering the role of project partners to aggregate projects and work with projects as a cohort or in a region. Are there examples of key organizations that can serve as aggregators for projects? What are their key attributions?
- 3.16 What are the key criteria OCED should consider, given the available \$200M per year for the next five years for the provision?

Other Transaction Agreements (OTA) and Partnership Intermediary Agreements (PIA): In addition to evaluating competitive funding through cooperative agreements or grants, OCED is also evaluating the use of OTAs and/or PIAs. While not frequently used by DOE, these mechanisms are used by other agencies to support workforce development, rapid prototyping, equipment acquisition, and even as another way to manage distributed projects.

- 3.17 Are there programs in other federal agencies run through OTAs or PIAs that could serve as models for OCED to consider?
- 3.18 If you have been a recipient under an OTA or PIA, are there distinct advantages for project management?

- 3.19 Are there key areas that could be supported through an OTA or PIA that OCED should consider when structuring the program?

Technical Assistance

DOE is considering providing technical assistance to awardees, and other potential recipients, including:

- Characterizing the potential for clean energy
- Assessing permitting and siting needs
- Assessing the needed interconnection, transmission, and other grid components
- Assessing system design and operational risk
- Providing measurement, reporting, and validation support to awardees
- Identifying and analyzing financing options for pursuing projects, including partnership opportunities
- Providing capacity-building support to enable effective engagement with private sector entities on environmental and energy justice matters, and
- Assessing existing workforce skills match with clean energy demonstration activities and other project dimensions critical for success.

- 3.20 Are there other key areas not listed above that should be considered for technical assistance needs for project and project developers?

- 3.21 Are there key organizations that should be considered to provide technical assistance, in addition to the Centers supported through EPA and the national laboratories?

- 3.22 Are there technical assistance programs that should be examined as key models for supporting rural and remote areas in improving energy infrastructure?

Evaluation, Analysis and Partnerships to Ensure Enduring Impacts

Measurement and validation during the period of performance of awards will be critical to ensuring that projects have potential for replicability.

- 3.23 What are some of the key measures that would need to be validated to demonstrate reliability enhancements?

- 3.24 How can OCED best release information that would allow for trusted validation of performance of these projects?

Category 4: Open

- 4.1 Please provide any additional information or input not specifically requested in the questions above that you believe would be valuable to help DOE develop the ERA Program.

Disclaimer and Important Notes

This RFI is not a FOA or funding mechanism; therefore, DOE is not currently accepting funding applications. There is no guarantee that a FOA, Prize, or other funding mechanism will be issued as a result of this RFI. Responding to this RFI does not provide any advantage or disadvantage to potential applicants if DOE chooses to issue a FOA regarding the subject matter. Final details, including the anticipated award size, quantity, and timing of DOE-funded awards, will be subject to Congressional appropriations and direction.

Any information obtained from this RFI is intended to be used by the Government on a non-attribution basis for planning and strategy development; this RFI does not constitute a formal solicitation for proposals or abstracts. Your response to this notice will be treated as information only. DOE will review and consider all responses in its formulation of program strategies for the identified materials of interest that are the subject of this request. DOE will not provide

reimbursement for costs incurred in responding to this RFI. Respondents are advised that DOE is under no obligation to acknowledge receipt of the information received or provide feedback to respondents with respect to any information submitted under this RFI. Responses to this RFI do not bind DOE to any further actions related to this topic.

Confidential Business Information

Pursuant to 10 CFR 1004.11, any person submitting information that they believe to be confidential and exempt by law from public disclosure should submit via email, postal mail, or hand delivery two well-marked copies: one copy of the document marked “confidential” including all the information believed to be confidential, and one copy of the document marked “non-confidential” with the information believed to be confidential deleted. Submittal via email is the preferred method, if feasible. DOE will make its own determination about the confidential status of the information and treat it according to its determination.

Request for Information Response Guidelines

Responses to this RFI must be submitted electronically to ERA@hq.doe.gov no later than 12:00pm (ET) on **12/05/2022**. Responses must be provided as attachments to an email. It is recommended that attachments with file sizes exceeding 25MB be compressed (i.e., zipped) to ensure message delivery. Responses must be provided as a Microsoft Word (.docx) attachment to the email, and no more than 50 pages in length, 12-point font, 1-inch margins. Only electronic written responses will be accepted.

For ease of replying and to aid categorization of your responses, please copy and paste the RFI questions, including the question numbering, and use them as a template for your response. Respondents may answer as many or as few questions as they wish.

OCED is not obliged to respond to individual submissions or publish publicly a compendium of responses. A response to this RFI will not be viewed as a binding commitment to develop or pursue the project or ideas discussed.

Respondents are requested to provide the following information at the start of their response to this RFI:

- Respondent name (could be individual or organization’s name)
- Name of point of contact for response (if response is on behalf of an organization)
- Point of contact's address, phone number, and e-mail address

Request for Information VERBAL Response Guidelines

In lieu of or in addition to providing written responses to this RFI, respondents may request a 30-minute individual unrecorded discussion with a DOE staff member regarding the content of their written responses to the RFI questions. Similarly, if a respondent is unable to submit written responses, or would otherwise prefer to do so, they may request a 30-minute individual discussion with a DOE staff member to verbally provide responses to the RFI questions. The discussion with a DOE staff member will be limited to the topics presented in the RFI. If a respondent wishes to participate in an individual discussion for either of these reasons, please submit your request to ERA@hq.doe.gov by Friday, November 18, 2022 and you will be contacted by an ERA Program staff member to schedule a time for the discussion. Requests for an individual discussion must be requested no later than 5:00 pm (ET) on Friday, November 18, 2022.

Respondents will be asked to provide the following information at the start of the verbal response to this RFI:

- Respondent name (could be individual or organization's name)
- Name of point of contact for response (if response is on behalf of an organization)
- Point of contact's address, phone number, and e-mail address