

Applicant Informational Webinar – Webinar Transcript

Slide 1: Introduction

Thank you again for attending the informational webinar. We will be starting shortly.

We are going to go ahead and get started. Hi, I am Johanna Wolfson. I am with the Technology-to-Market team at the Department of Energy's Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE).

Thanks so much for joining us, and we want to apologize for the inconvenience of having to need to reschedule from this past Tuesday. Today's webinar is going to review our Innovative Pathways Funding Opportunity Announcement. The content is largely the same as the webinar that was held on January 4, except that we will not go into as much detail on some points in this webinar, and we have some additional clarifications to present to you based on questions that we have received. This presentation will be posted on EERE Exchange, in the same location where you can download the Funding Opportunity Announcement. Slides from that previous webinar, a transcript from that webinar, and answers to questions that we have received so far are also posted on EERE Exchange. You can find the webinar information at EERE Exchange and by using the FOA number listed on the slide to locate the documents.

I am going to go through the slides and then hand it off to my colleague. I will also leave time for questions and answers in the last 30 minutes. We have muted everyone's phone lines to streamline the communication and question asking. If you want to ask a question type that question into the Q&A box in the webinar. You can do that at any time during the presentation and at the end of the presentation, we will start reading through those and answering the questions. So with that, I will go ahead and get started.

Slide 2: Notice

All potential applicants should carefully read the entire FOA. Everything we go over today is included in the announcement or in the Q&A's posted on EERE Exchange. A lot of time and thought went into writing the FOA so we hope that you will read the document very thoroughly to make sure your application is fully aligned.

This presentation is not comprehensive, it summarizes what we think is most important for you to keep in mind as you are finalizing applications. The FOA document is the comprehensive resource. If we make a mistake and anything is inconsistent with what is written in the FOA, the FOA is the controlling document. If you do notice any inconsistency, please email us at T2M@ee.doe.gov.

Slide 3: Questions

In general, if there are any questions about the Funding Opportunity Announcement, please email that same address noted on the slide. Include the FOA name and number in the subject line in the email. All questions and answers pertaining to this FOA will be answered and posted to EERE Exchange, unless the same question or a very similar one has already been asked and answered. Note that if you do email a question to us, it is going to be answered on EERE exchange rather than answered in an email directly. We will try to post answers within three business days. If you are asking last minute questions right

before the application deadline, there is a chance that the question will not be answered in time for you to incorporate into your applications, so please ask those questions as soon as possible.

If you have any problems logging onto and or uploading and submitting application documents in EERE Exchange, there is a specific support group that you can email for assistance and that email address is on the slide. Please be aware that EERE Exchange support leaves for the day at 5pm Eastern, so if you are in the middle of trying to submit your full application or having a problem and it is after 5pm ET, you will be out of luck. We, as the program team, are not able to provide any backend Exchange assistance and strongly encourage you to submit early as there can be bugs in Exchange and DOE cannot accept any late applications even if they are due to IT issues. Again, all questions asked during this presentation will be posted to Exchange.

Slide 4: Schedule

Slide four provides an overview of the schedule. Please note that submitting a Letter of Intent is no longer required, so if you did not submit a Letter of Intent, you may still submit a Full Application. Make sure that you submit your application by February 15th at 3pm eastern, and allow several hours to do so in case there are any glitches. There is a tendency for EERE Exchange to get slow right at the deadline, we encourage you to submit early. Again, we cannot accept late submissions, even if they are due to IT issues. Some of the other near term dates are noted on the slide and are all estimates and subject to change. We will keep you notified.

Slide 5: FOA Description

Slide five provides a high level overview of the funding opportunity. This Funding Opportunity is seeking to surface new testable and scalable ways to alleviate common structural challenges facing promising new energy technologies on the pathway to market. It is important to understand that for this opportunity, EERE is not seeking to support individual technology solutions directly. Rather, we are interested in proposals for the implementation of novel mechanisms that could address some of the common structural challenges that technologists face en route to market. There are many examples of what we mean by this listed out in the Funding Opportunity Announcement. Our intent is to pilot and evaluate those new mechanisms and position those that are successful for adoption by the private sector.

Applicants need to present a plan to test out the viability of the proposed model and ideally to quantify the value of that approach to private sector partners. A new model should be something you can test out in the real world with relevant partners, analyze the outcomes to get a clear signal on whether an idea is viable, and whether it is applicable for adoption by the energy industry as a whole. All proposals should have a testable hypothesis. We are only interested in ideas that have the ability to be proven wrong. You should outline the specific work that will be done to test the project's hypothesis.

Slide 6: Topic Areas and Technical Areas of Interest

We are looking for proposals in two different Topic areas. The first Topic is collaboration between the technical community and industry. The second Topic is lowering barriers to resource access. We have highlighted two Areas of Interest, one under each Topic. The first area of interest, the one under Topic 1, is models for forging industry-startup partnerships and the second area of interest, under Topic 2, is new investment models. I will go into detail on those in the next two slides, but I want to highlight that

we are welcoming proposals with concepts outside of those two highlighted Areas of Interest as long as they are within the scope of the overall Topics. All proposals that we receive, that fall within the broad scopes of Topics 1 or 2, will be considered and reviewed. Applicants can only submit one full application per Topic as the prime applicant, but that does not prohibit anyone from collaborating on other applications as a sub recipient or a partner. There is no limit on the number of applications that one can collaborate on as a sub recipient or a partner, whether or not you are a prime applicant on another application.

Slide 7: Topic 1 and Area of Interest

On the next two slides I will provide a high level overview of each Topic and the associated Area of Interest. In the FOA document, we have listed several examples of the different models under the two Topics that would potentially be of interest, I am not going into those examples here. Those examples are not at all meant to limit the applicants in proposing solutions, but are meant to provide some ideas and guiding thoughts.

For Topic 1, which is Technical Community and Industry Collaboration, we want to support collaboration among technology developers and industry to level the disconnect between the technical community and the market. We're seeking to support models for collaboration so innovations can both be better prepared for market adoption and so that market players can explore new innovations more easily.

The specific area of interest that we have highlighted under Topic 1 is models for industry startup partnerships. This area of interest was highlighted due to the feedback we received that there are many programs assisting technology developers with initial business plan development and early stage prototypes, but far fewer help technology developers and innovators develop products that are relevant to industry problems and commercially-hardened, and able to be integrated into the complex systems in the energy industry.

We are specifically interested in proposals that facilitate this better industry start-up collaboration. The proposals should focus on presenting feasible ways to overcome barriers that are currently preventing effective collaboration – those barriers are detailed in the FOA document. We really want to see you articulate why collaborations are not currently occurring at scale, and why your idea specifically has the potential to smooth those barriers. We want to see that you have a method by which to stress-test your model with existing industry partners and be able to evaluate its viability. Models that don't have the potential to be disproved are not of interest for this funding opportunity. Finally, we want applicants to articulate a pathway to private sector adoption in the case that a model is shown to be promising and successful.

Slide 8: Topic 2 and Area of Interest

Topic 2, Lowering Barriers to Resources Access, stems from the fact that the U.S. innovation system has a number of strengths in terms of its financial and physical resources. However, as we know these resources are not always optimally aligned and especially not always optimally available to early stage innovators. Thus, we are looking for ways to lower barriers and align incentives that could enable both capital and physical resources to be used more effectively by the energy innovation community.

The area of interest we are highlighting under this Topic is New Investment Models. As discussed in the FOA, conventional venture capital investment into early-stage energy innovation has declined

significantly in the past several years. At the same time, new capital sources have been highlighted that have the potential to be unlocked if the right mechanisms could be presented and shown to be viable. We are very interested in proposals to develop and test new investment models, and have provided some examples of this in the funding opportunity. Again, not meant to limit applications just to provide ideas. We want to make sure that applicants are presenting concrete and feasible ways to overcome specific barriers that are seen currently preventing investment. Applicants need to present an understanding of how to overcome those barriers and how an individual solution is going to be different than current methods. Again, we want to see that there is a method by which to stress-test and validate a proposed investment model. For instance, that could be done by simulating an investment portfolio or developing a specific structured financing instrument for testing by the financial community. Again models that do not have the potential to be disproved are not of interest for this funding opportunity. Finally as in the previous case, we are looking to see a clear pathway to private sector adoption of any validated models. That is because we are looking to catalyze innovation models that would ultimately be relevant to the industry as a whole, and that provide clear value to the private sector.

One really important point is that we are not providing funds for direct equity investment into clean energy companies, because that is not an allowable use of Federal funds. Instead, we want to support the work that is required to evaluate new ways of investing and bringing investment partners on board to test out the viability of a proposal and analyze outcomes. In certain cases, funds could be used indirectly for technology development if and only if the method itself is being tested it just cannot happen by way of equity investment.

Slide 9: Additional Proposal Considerations

On the next slide we are listing out some additional considerations, all drawing from the FOA, that we want to highlight. The next two slides are really important. If there is any consideration listed on this slide or the next slide that is not very clearly met by your proposal, the proposal is really unlikely to be funded. So I'm just going to read through these two slides.

First, applicants should clearly demonstrate the ability to create scalable solutions that are applicable to the broader clean energy industry.

Proposed models, should they be proven to be viable and adoptable, should have the potential to unlock significant additional capital or change the way in which clean energy technologies achieve market entry.

Third, partnerships, with entities directly involved in industry and investment such as private sector, subject matter experts and practitioners, are strongly encouraged. Those partners need to be integrated into the proposed approach in a way that guarantees their direct involvement rather than a vague commitment of involvement. Proposals should specify exactly how those relevant partners will engage into the process.

Proposals need to present a plan to test the viability of the proposed approach by the end of Year 1 and to quantify the value of the approach to private sector partners. Finally, the FOA is primarily intended to test new approaches to overcoming common barriers facing all clean energy technologies. Applicants must clearly describe the novelty or additive value of the proposed approach.

Slide 10: Clarifications

This slide is virtually the only new content relative to the last webinar and draws from questions that we have received. Again, all questions and answers are posted on EERE Exchange, but here we are highlighting some of the most common misunderstandings we have been seeing.

First, EERE is only interested in ideas that have the ability to be proven untenable so the proposed model must be disprovable. Therefore, applicants must present a clear testable hypothesis. Applications lacking a clear testable hypothesis are unlikely to be funded. Milestone achievements such as meetings conducted or introductions made would not qualify as proof of viability or stress-testing. It's up to the applicants to develop a robust viability test, depending on the type of model being proposed. (Some examples could include positive financial results being modeled, supporting data being collected, legal frameworks being constructed, letters of commitment or investment dollars secured, or any other tangible outcomes achieved such as signed agreements between start-ups and corporate partners.) Again, those are just examples and without knowing the details of the model it is pretty hard to advise on the robust viability test but results of the viability test would be presented to DOE and to reviewers at the end of Year 1.

Importantly, we are not funding any research projects about the problem and challenges described in the FOA, nor are we funding the research or development of white papers around potential theoretical solutions. This FOA specifically geared toward implementation in the real world. As I mentioned a couple slides ago, awarded funds could be used indirectly for technology development if the purpose is to test an improved way to deploy or utilize those funds en route to market. However, as stated DOE funds cannot be invested in companies for equity. EERE is not seeking regional-based approaches. New mechanisms or models should be tested with technology developers and startups of greatest interest to the market, wherever they are, rather than with developers or startups that are from a preselected geographic region. Applicants are responsible for articulating how the solutions of greatest interest to the market will be identified and selected. Foreign entities are eligible to apply to the FOA. However, proposed models should be applicable to the U.S. market in order to be eligible. Single proposals that jointly address both Topics are welcome. You will need to select one Topic or the other in EERE Exchange from the drop down menu but you are welcome to span over both Topics in a single application.

Now I am going to hand it over to my colleague to go over some additional points before we get into Q&A.

Slide 11: Key Submission Points

This slide provides some key submission points where we have seen some people make errors and that could disqualify themselves from review. Submissions could be deemed ineligible if you do not fill out all the required fields through the submission process in Exchange. Please make sure you fill out everything that is required within Exchange and all of the required fields in the document that you need to upload, or the application cannot be reviewed.

You are STRONGLY encouraged to submit at least 48 hours in advance of the deadline. This will allow you, if you encounter a technical error, to have time to contact the technical support and get assistance. Technical glitches are very possible in Exchange, I will repeat technical glitches are very possible in Exchange, so we advise you to get familiar with the system and submit early. If you wait until the last

minute and have a problem that results in a late submission, the contracting officers will not accept your application and the program team will not be able to review it. There are no exceptions. So please do not wait until the last second.

The best advice we can give you is to submit several days early even if the proposal is not final, and then resubmit your final proposal several hours before the deadline. That way, if worst comes to worst and you encounter a technical glitch on the 15th, there is something in the system that we can review. It's better than not having any submission in the system. If you do make changes, make sure you hit resubmit, otherwise, your application will not show up in the system.

For your records, make sure that you print the EERE Exchange confirmation you receive after submitting your full application. This could help if there is a glitch on our side. The confirmation will contain your application control number.

Finally, take careful note of the 3pm eastern deadline! It is not 5 pm. Again, take careful note of the 3pm eastern deadline. It is not 5pm. We do this because we don't want to risk the EERE Exchange help desk personnel leaving shortly before the deadline.

Slide 12: Registration Requirements

There are some registration requirements that can be confusing. If you wait until the very last day to start your submission process, you will realize you need some key registration numbers to submit your application, and it will be too late. The most important registration number is the DUNS number. This number is part of the SF-424 form that you need to submit as part of your full application. The other accounts on this slide will be required to receive federal funding if you are selected. Hopefully everyone who is submitting an application has obtained a DUNS number, as it can take several weeks to obtain.

Slide 13: Full Application Compliance

There are several things that you need to make sure you accomplish to be compliant. The components of the full application as noted on the slide include: the technical volume, where you describe your project; the SF-424 which is your official request for federal assistance; your summary slide, which we will use to brief senior leadership on the recommended selections; and then the other administrative documents that are mentioned in the funding opportunity if and where applicable. If you are selected for negotiations for an award, there will be an additional set of documents you will need to fill out during the negotiation process.

Slide 14: Full Applications: Technical Volume Content

The technical volume for the full applications is what the reviewers will read to provide you with a score, so you should take great care in the construction of this section. We have a total page limit of seven pages. Again, we have a total page limit of seven pages, but you can adjust the individual components within that seven page limit. We will not enforce page limits by section, these are just approximations and suggestions, but, we will enforce the seven page limit for the entire document. If you go over the seven pages, anything over the limit will not be reviewed. Also please note that in the workplan you will be asked to submit an estimated project budget for the full two years. This is meant to be pretty high level. We are not asking for the full detailed budget request that you would be asked to

fill out if you are selected to receive an actual award. The full budget request will be completed during the award negotiation but, for now you need to know how much you are requesting, what's your project cost share will be, and roughly the categories of how this money will be spent, things like personnel time, travel, and vendor costs.

Slide 15: Replies to Reviewer Comments

After your proposal is submitted and reviewed, you will be able to sign into EERE Exchange. You will receive an email notification to login into Exchange and will be able to see what the reviewers write. These will be raw reviewers' comments. These comments are not a reflection of EERE's views of your application. These are a reflection of the independent merit reviewers' views. You will have the opportunity, for approximately three business days, to reply to the reviewer comments in the event that something was misunderstood and/or you would like to directly respond to a criticism. You do not have to reply to reviewer comments, it is not required but, it is something you should plan for if it is desired. When you receive that notification you will only have a few days to respond.

Slide 16: Pre-Selection Interviews

After that point, there will be some additional things that need to happen during the review process, most notably the pre-selection interview. This pre-selection interview means that we may call and/or email you to either ask for some additional clarifying questions or for an in-person interview. These are not mandatory. Again, the interviews are not mandatory, they are our request for clarification. If you are asked for a pre-selection interview, this does not represent that you have been selected but, means you are under consideration and that we have additional questions. We anticipate scheduling interviews in regionally-centric area(s).

Slide 17: FOA Review Timeline

The next slide is the FOA review timeline. I am going to briefly touch on some of these deadlines and then I am going to move on. You'll see that the full application deadline is February 15 at 3pm ET. Additionally, the expected receipt of reviewer comments will be from mid to late March and the reply for the applicants to the reviewer comments again will be mid to late March. The final thing to note is EERE anticipants making awards by September 15. Again, anticipates making awards by September 15.

Slide 18: Questions

This presentation and the questions and answers will be posted to EERE Exchange. If you are unable to get your question answered on this webinar or have questions about the FOA, please email the T2M@ee.doe.gov inbox as noted on the slide and we will do our best to answer them quickly, before the deadline, unless they have already been answered on the online Q&A. Again, if you have problems logging into EERE Exchange, please email the EERE Exchange support inbox as noted on the slide. Be sure to include the FOA name when you do so and now we will be happy to take questions via the chat and/or the Q&A box. We prefer that you actually submit your questions via the Q&A box.

Please see the Questions and Answers document for responses to the webinar questions.