Engaging States to Advance State Energy Office Priorities

DATE: September 10, 2020
SUBJECT: Request for Information (RFI), DE-FOA-0002274

Description

The U.S Department of Energy's (DOE), Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE), State Energy Program (SEP) seeks information from the public on organizations, including industry, academia, nonprofit organizations, and others, that have the expertise to support state energy offices (SEOs); in particular, EERE hopes to receive comments from energy office directors and their senior policy staff that design and implement energy efficiency and renewable energy programs in their respective states. The desired outcome of this request is to enhance how DOE SEP delivers specific technical assistance and provides direct support to help states maximize the affordability, reliability, and resiliency of their state-led energy policies and programs.

Background

For more than 40 years, pursuant to 42 U.S.C 6321, the State Energy Program (SEP) has provided financial and technical assistance to 50 states, five U.S. territories, and the District of Columbia. The state energy offices (SEOs) are the sole recipients of SEP funds via a federal financial assistance agreement (See 10 CFR Part 420 Subpart B). Each SEO receives financial assistance in the form of annual formula grants. SEOs use SEP formula funds to establish broad plans and strategies that address state-led energy goals and priorities. In addition to providing direct funding in support of state energy goals, SEP provides technical assistance to states. Technical assistance further enhances SEO-led efforts to update state energy plans, adopt and implement new financing and funding programs, and implement programs that reduce energy costs in public buildings and facilities.

A component of SEP's technical assistance is multi-year cooperative agreements that support organizations with the capacity and expertise to serve all 56 SEOs, often through in-person workshops, peer exchange or via written topical papers or reports. This assistance ensures delivery of priority energy-saving programs in states and improves coordination between DOE and the SEOs. The agreements allow both federal and state-level decision makers to continually improve the efficacy and impact of financial investments in energy programs. (See 10 CFR 420.4, Technical Assistance.)

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The overall goals of these technical assistance agreements for SEP are to:

- Support the creation of state-specific energy assurance plans that enhance security, resiliency, and emergency preparedness at the state level;
- Assist state-led efforts to achieve greater energy savings and spur robust economic development;
- Provide a foundation for state-led strategic energy initiatives that deliver creative solutions to persistent market and regulatory barriers; and
- Enhance national and regional efforts to help accelerate the adoption of a wide variety of energy efficiency and renewable energy technologies.

Purpose

The purpose of this RFI is to solicit feedback from members of the public as well as industry, academia, nonprofits, consultants, and other organizations that have deep expertise in the energy situation, needs and opportunities in all 56 states and territories, and extensive experience working directly with state energy office directors and their senior staff. SEP is specifically interested in information on such organizations' capacity as well as the ability and experience to provide direct support to all 56 SEOs delegated by their governors with implementation of the State Energy Program. Direct support includes collection of state-level energy data, analyses of trends, sharing best practices between states and regions, and providing input into new state initiatives and priorities. The desired outcome is to enhance how DOE SEP delivers specific technical assistance to all 56 SEOs that helps states maximize the affordability, reliability, and resiliency of their state-led comprehensive energy policies and programs.

Disclaimer and Important Notes

This RFI is not a Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA); therefore, EERE is not accepting applications at this time. EERE may issue a FOA in the future based on or related to the content and responses to this RFI; however, EERE may also elect not to issue a FOA. There is no guarantee that a FOA will be issued as a result of this RFI. Responding to this RFI does not provide any advantage or disadvantage to potential applicants if EERE chooses to issue a FOA regarding the subject matter. Final details, including any anticipated award size, quantity, and timing of EERE funded awards, will be subject to Congressional appropriations and direction.

Any information obtained as a result of 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. EERE will review and consider all responses in its formulation of program

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strategies for the identified materials of interest that are the subject of this request. EERE will not provide reimbursement for costs incurred in responding to this RFI. Respondents are advised that EERE 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 EERE to any further actions related to this topic.

Proprietary Information

Because information received in response to this RFI may be used to structure future programs and FOAs and/or otherwise be made available to the public, **respondents are strongly advised to NOT include any information in their responses that might be considered business sensitive, proprietary, or otherwise confidential.** If, however, a respondent chooses to submit business sensitive, proprietary, or otherwise confidential information, it must be clearly and conspicuously marked as such in the response.

Responses containing confidential, proprietary, or privileged information must be conspicuously marked as described below. Failure to comply with these marking requirements may result in the disclosure of the unmarked information under the Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. 552, or otherwise. The U.S. Federal Government is not liable for the disclosure or use of unmarked information, and may use or disclose such information for any purpose.

If your response contains confidential, proprietary, or privileged information, you must include a cover sheet marked as follows identifying the specific pages containing confidential, proprietary, or privileged information:

> **Notice of Restriction on Disclosure and Use of Data:**
> Pages [List Applicable Pages] of this response may contain confidential, proprietary, or privileged information that is exempt from public disclosure. Such information shall be used or disclosed only for the purposes described in this RFI [Enter RFI Number]. The Government may use or disclose any information that is not appropriately marked or otherwise restricted, regardless of source.
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> In addition, (1) the header and footer of every page that contains confidential, proprietary, or privileged information must be marked as follows: "Contains Confidential, Proprietary, or Privileged Information Exempt from Public Disclosure" and (2) every line and paragraph containing proprietary, privileged, or trade secret information must be clearly marked with double brackets or highlighting.

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Evaluation and Administration by Federal and Non-Federal Personnel

Federal employees are subject to the non-disclosure requirements of a criminal statute, the Trade Secrets Act, 18 U.S.C. 1905. The Government may seek the advice of qualified non-Federal personnel. The Government may also use non-Federal personnel to conduct routine, nondiscretionary administrative activities. The respondents, by submitting their response, consent to EERE providing their response to non-Federal parties. Non-Federal parties given access to responses must be subject to an appropriate obligation of confidentiality prior to being given the access. Submissions may be reviewed by support contractors and private consultants.

Request for Information Categories and Questions

Category 1: State energy and assurance planning

Supporting state energy and energy assurance planning are two essential roles of SEOs and the State Energy Program. For your organization or another organization with which you are familiar, please answer the following:

1. In what areas and topics does the organization possess deep expertise in the energy situation, needs, and opportunities in all 56 states and territories?
    a. Please highlight a few topics with relevant examples of where such expertise helped support implementation needs or policy outcomes.

2. How would the organization make available to all 56 SEOs support for statewide energy planning—in particular, stakeholder engagement, energy forecasting, scenario modeling, and other key steps needed to ensure plans best enhance state-led policies on energy affordability or other state priorities? Please describe organizational capacity and provide examples of direct technical assistance to support SEOs.
    a. Please provide examples of how the organization has assisted SEOs in supporting emerging issues in energy planning. As appropriate, please cite examples including, but not limited to, the use of modeling tools or analysis to inform opportunities for the grid integration of cost-effective distributed energy resources.

3. How would the organization make available support for all 56 SEOs for state energy assurance planning by SEOs to help states prepare for and be positioned to respond to weather-related or other natural or man-made emergencies that may impact energy supplies?
    a. How would the organization support new or improved SEO engagement in energy assurance planning activities? Please provide examples of in-person convenings as well as other technical assistance delivery methods (e.g., exercises, modeling, or

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written guidance, etc.) to ensure SEOs effectively perform their designated emergency function.

    b.   What partnerships would the organization engage in to ensure all 56 SEOs have access to energy data, risk assessments, and best practices necessary to inform ongoing assurance planning? Partnerships can include those with state and local emergency planners, utilities, and industry. Please cite examples as appropriate.

Category 2: Use of trainings and other technical assistance mechanisms

The ability to provide substantive energy program and policy training opportunities for all 56 SEO directors and their staff is an important role of organizations that support states. Additionally, SEOs have identified economic development, job creation, and work force development as areas of particular interest. Please answer the following:

1.   What approaches would the organization use to make training available for all 56 SEOs in developing new energy efficiency and renewable energy policies and programs, or making existing programs more impactful?

    a.   How would the organization provide training for individual SEO directors as well as across all 56 SEOs?

    b.   What qualitative approaches would the organization use to measure the success of such trainings?

    c.   What quantitative methods would the organization use to measure, monitor, and evaluate outcomes from trainings? Examples might include databases or analyses to track impact in terms of policy development or program outcomes.

    d.   What training platforms would the organization use? Please cite examples of both in-person and technology-assisted interactions. Examples could include webinars, virtual forums, or computer-assisted learning.

    e.   What partnerships with SEO stakeholder groups (e.g., industry, academia, etc.) demonstrate the ability to efficiently facilitate trainings?

2.   How would the organization ensure all 56 SEOs have access to leading ideas, information, and experts (e.g., private sector, academia, think tanks, etc.) representing differing perspectives on energy issues? This would be more than simply posting information on a website that SEOs can access or including information in a newsletter.

3.   From the organization's perspective, what does the future of training and technical assistance for SEOs look like (e.g., written, visual, group discussion, etc.) and what are a few examples of emerging opportunities?

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4. What workforce development programs would the organization use to support efforts by all 56 SEOs to create or maintain energy-related jobs?
    a. What are leading programs across the country? Please cite examples of SEO or state-led efforts; examples of other programs are welcome.
    b. What are the top challenges in training a workforce suitable for deploying current energy efficiency technologies and developing future advances in these energy technologies?

5. What does the organization see as the most effective strategies to support SEO efforts to create jobs and enhance economic development in the energy-related sectors?
    a. What are some promising practices SEOs are using or considering using to support job growth in one or both sectors (e.g., working groups, financing programs, education efforts)?
    b. How would the organization enhance or fill gaps in either existing or forthcoming SEO efforts?

Category 3: Support for energy affordability through access to financing or technical assistance

Financing mechanisms and technical assistance supported by states can lower costs for taxpayers and businesses by making energy efficiency and renewable energy technology more accessible. Please answer the following:

1. What partnership models would the organization support for ensuring all 56 SEOs have access to needed expertise on energy efficiency and renewable energy project financing?
    a. What types of peer-to-peer sharing efforts have been most successful? What experts or organizations have most effectively supported state programs?
    b. What partnerships have best attracted private-sector funds to leverage state resources? Please cite examples including public-private partnerships or other collaborations involving state agencies.

2. Please define how the organization would make direct support available to all 56 SEOs in the design, development, and implementation of programs that reduce the upfront costs for energy efficiency or renewable energy projects. Posting information on a website that SEOs can access or including information in a newsletter is not considered "direct support."
    a. What are specific procurement or programmatic models that seek to leverage private sector funds or access tax benefits (e.g., Energy Investment Partnerships, Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy, etc.) and how would the organization support these efforts?

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    b.   What financing programs or technical assistance strategies have been most effective at lowering the cost of state government operations (e.g., Energy Savings Performance Contracts) and how would the organization support these efforts?

3. Please discuss how the organization would provide direct support to help all 56 SEOs identify and solve key challenges in creating, maintaining, and evaluating energy financing programs. When possible, please cite examples. Posting information on a website that SEOs can access or including information in a newsletter is not considered "direct support."
    a.   With respect to collecting and analyzing energy data from projects supported by energy efficiency financing programs, what are the key challenges that exist for SEOs?
    b.   What are leading efforts to improve the evaluation, measurement, and verification (EM&V) of energy efficiency financing programs?

4. Please describe how the organization would provide direct support to make assistance available to all 56 SEOs in order to address key challenges to energy efficiency and renewable energy affordability in hard-to-reach markets, specifically low-income and/or rural areas. Posting information on a website that SEOs can access or including information in a newsletter is not considered "direct support."
    a.   How has the organization made assistance available to all 56 SEOs to better serve low-to-moderate income and/or rural communities?
    b.   What partnership structures are most successful? Please provide examples.
    c.   What barriers and risks still exist for such constituencies, and what strategies for overcoming those barriers and addressing risks have been most effective?

Category 4: Partnerships to support energy technology development and adoption
A number of SEOs fund or otherwise provide support for energy research, development, demonstration, and deployment (RDD&D) activities. Such efforts range from programs that invest in basic laboratory research to programs that validate energy-saving technologies to partnerships that support commercialization of energy efficiency technologies.

1. How does the organization support energy efficiency RDD&D across sectors (e.g., buildings, manufacturing, etc.) and technologies (e.g., lighting, insulation, etc.)?

2. Please describe key partnerships that the organization would make available to all 56 SEOs in order to help them validate and deploy energy technologies. Please cite specific examples where applicable.
    a.   How do such partnerships benefit SEOs?

    b.   What are opportunities for improved collaboration with other states/regions, U.S. DOE, national laboratories, and the private sector?

    c.   What partnerships does the organization feel are less effective?

3. What are the opportunities that may exist for sharing state best practices among all 56 SEOs for state-led technology deployment partnerships? Please cite forums, workshops, or collaborations with national laboratories as appropriate. What other opportunities would the organization consider to undertake to spur technology deployment in all 56 SEOs?

Request for Information Response Guidelines

Responses to this RFI must be submitted electronically to State_Energy_OfficeRFI_DOEWIP@ee.doe.gov **no later than 5:00pm (ET) October 16, 2020.** 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 10 pages in length, 12 point font, and 1 inch margins. Only electronic responses will be accepted.

Please identify your answers by responding to a specific question or topic if applicable. Respondents may answer as many or as few questions as they wish.

EERE will not 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:

- Company/institution name;
- Company/institution contact; and
- Contact's address, phone number, and e-mail address.

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