



Office of Technology Transitions

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY



EPIC Round 3

Energy Program for
Innovation Clusters

Powered by the Office
of Technology Transitions

Official Rules

Updated March 2024

What Is This Document?

This document provides competitors with information to construct a compliant, and potentially successful, submission package to participate in the Energy Program for Innovation Clusters (EPIC) Round 3. The program will fund incubator organizations that seek to help energy technology startups succeed. For the purposes of this document, the U.S. Department of Energy uses “incubator” to refer to any organization that aids in the development of new business ventures, including business incubators and accelerators, co-working startup communities, or any other organizations that self-identify as advocates for innovation and entrepreneurship. The program also supports energy technology companies (nominated by participating incubators) via startup pitch competitions.

This document describes a funding program that utilizes both prize authority¹ and financial assistance.² This document contains the Official Rules and guidance for how to compete in Round 3 of the two-phase prize competition, where the winners of the second phase will be invited to directly negotiate a multiyear \$1,000,000 cooperative agreement managed by the Office of Technology Transitions.

Reading this document in full should answer most questions that potential competitors may have. Failure to follow these instructions will result in a non-compliant submission package.

To apply, please register with the American-Made Network online application portal, HeroX, at [Energy Program for Innovation Clusters \(EPIC\) Round 3 | HeroX](#). Required forms for Full Applications are available on the HeroX website.

DATE	MODIFICATION DETAILS
March 15, 2024 Edits highlighted throughout document	Changed number of Phase 1 winners from 20 to 23
	Added new detail on Startup Pitch Competition #1 in Section 8
	Updated prize table in Section 2.1 to reflect prize increase and Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) prize addition. Added Startup Competition #1 prize breakout table in 8.1.1 Prize Amounts .
	Added new detail on JEDI Prize to Startup Pitch Competition Rules in Section 8.5.1
April 12, 2024 Edits highlighted	Added new detail on Startup Pitch Competition #3 in Section 8 .

¹ America Competes Act

² 2CFR200 and 2CFR910

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1. Introduction

The Energy Program for Innovation Clusters (EPIC) Round 3³ is a \$4 million to \$9 million (pending FY24 appropriations) program to support incubators developing new programs that support energy entrepreneurs and startups.

In this program, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) seeks to fund organizations that aid in the development of new business ventures, including incubators, accelerators, co-working startup communities, or any other organizations that self-identify as advocates for innovation and entrepreneurship (referred to as “incubators” throughout the document). DOE encourages these organizations to compete in EPIC.

This rules document is for Round 3 of the two-phase EPIC program. In Phase 1, winners will win \$150,000. In Phase 2, winners will be invited to negotiate a cooperative agreement for up to \$1,000,000. Additionally, winners will be invited to nominate one of their startup companies to participate in the Startup Pitch Competition portion of the program, with additional cash prizes for the startups.

1.1 Background

DOE helps power and secure America's future and ensure the country's role as a leader in science and technology. DOE's Office of Technology Transitions (OTT) was established by the U.S. Congress through the Energy Policy Act of 2005 (EPAcT 2005)⁴ and reauthorized by the Energy Act of 2020 (EA 2020) to “promote promising energy technologies for commercial purposes.”⁵

According to the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration, over one million people in this country start a business each year, and by the end of the first year, at least 40% of them will be out of business. Within five years, more than 80% of them will have failed.⁶ Along with strengthening existing industries, startups drive technology development and the creation of new industries, business model innovation, and job creation. Barriers to market entry for hardware or hard-tech⁷ startups are particularly high and include large capital requirements,⁸ long development times, and the need to integrate into complex systems and supply chains.⁹ EPIC was created to increase the number of businesses that successfully navigate the startup process and have major impacts on the U.S. economy and workforce by bringing new energy technologies to market.

OTT developed EPIC to encourage robust growth of regional energy innovation ecosystems across the United States. Innovation ecosystems, or clusters, increase the productivity of startups, drive the direction and pace of innovation, and stimulate the formation of new businesses, which further reinforces the

³ This is the third prize program to bear the name EPIC. All programs are focused on incentivizing incubators to focus on energy technology related to DOE's mission. Although similar, this is a new and distinct program.

⁴ Energy Policy Act of 2005, Public Law 109-58, 109th Cong. (August 8, 2005), Improved Technology Transfer of Energy Technologies, 42 U.S. Code § 16391 (a).

⁵ Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, Public Law 116-260, 116th Cong. (December 27, 2020), 134 Stat. 2597, Sec. 9003. <https://www.congress.gov/116/plaws/publ260/PLAW-116publ260.pdf>.

⁶ David A. Lewis, Elsie Harper-Anderson, and Lawrence A. Molnar, *Incubation Best Practices That Lead to Successful New Ventures* (2011); U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration

⁷ Any technology solution that involves physical products or processes, including those that are chemical or biological in nature.

⁸ Hara Wang, Cyril Yee, *Climate Tech's Four Valleys of Death and Why We Must Build a Bridge* (2020); Rocky Mountain Institute

⁹ David J. Garfield, Kate E. Moore, Richard Adams, *New Approaches to Energy Hardware Innovation and Incubation* (2019); UMD and EFI, *Regional Clean Energy Innovation*

cluster itself. EPIC fulfills the congressional mandate for OTT to establish a competitive funding program for incubators supporting energy innovation clusters.¹⁰

OTT recognizes that technology startups, particularly in energy-related sectors, often require a variety of services over and above capital access, including mentorship, technology validation, business development, and connections to manufacturers. With the help of targeted business assistance—in the form of company incubation—entrepreneurs are better prepared to turn their innovations into successful new ventures that have a greater-than-average chance of success.¹¹ Incubators provide important services to assist startups in getting to market and play an increasingly important role for companies and entrepreneurs.

Strong business incubation services—including, but not limited to, mentoring, entrepreneurial training, access to testing, and prototyping assistance—not only provide direct support for early-stage startups, but also have the potential to de-risk the startups for follow-on investment. Incubators have the potential to accelerate regional economic development, including promoting innovation and entrepreneurship in historically disadvantaged communities,¹² strengthen national innovation capacity, expand domestic energy-related manufacturing, and foster a more diverse and inclusive innovation ecosystem. By screening applicant companies, helping them prototype, connecting entrepreneurs with manufacturers, and advising startups on business strategy, incubators play a critical role in supporting startups as they transition into the market.

Funding for incubators is not widespread, given a funding focus on individual companies and laboratory research, and EPIC represents DOE's effort to engage with and support this community.

2. EPIC Summary

2.1 Overview

This document is the official rules and guidance for the Energy Program for Innovation Clusters (EPIC)¹³ Round 3. This EPIC program opened for submissions on September 26, 2023, and is open to incubators that support energy-related startups, including those incubators that participated in previous iterations of the EPIC program. OTT's EPIC is part of DOE's American-Made Challenges and the associated Network. The National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) serves as the Prize Administrator for American-Made Challenges.

Feedback from previous EPIC participants (both winners and applicants) as well as the *Commercialization Programs Request for Information (RFI)* indicated that incubators benefit both from the streamlined application processes and quick injections of capital offered by prize competitions, and the stable long-term capital provided by cooperative agreements. The new approach to EPIC (combining a prize competition with a cooperative agreement negotiation) encourages bold and impactful ideas while providing the long-term funding needed to scale those ideas. The prize portion allows a lower barrier to entry for new and less established entities, while offering established entities the opportunity to develop novel programming quickly and efficiently. The cooperative agreement component of EPIC rewards the highest performers with a multiyear stable source of funding to scale their new model without the burden and risk of completing the application process for financial assistance.

¹⁰ Energy Act of 2020, Title IX, Section 1001-6G.

¹¹ David A. Lewis, Elsie Harper-Anderson, and Lawrence A. Molnar. 2011. *Incubation Best Practices That Lead to Successful New Ventures*. U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration.

¹² [Justice40 Initiative | Department of Energy](#) and <https://energyjustice.egs.anl.gov/>

¹³ This is the third round of this program with the same name.

This program consists of five components:

1. Phase 1 – Prize Competition:

Competitors will design a minimum viable program (MVP)¹⁴ and demonstrate that they have a plan, access to the right networks, and the skills and expertise to successfully implement their MVP. It is expected that during Phase 1, competitors solicit and incorporate feedback from key stakeholders on their program design to ensure they can start implementing quickly in Phase 2.

Any non-governmental entity that meets the eligibility requirements can apply to Phase 1. Winners will each receive a \$150,000 cash prize. See [Section 5, Phase 1 Rules](#), for more information.

2. Phase 2 – Prize Competition Resulting in a Cooperative Agreement:

Only winners of Phase 1 are eligible to compete in Phase 2. In Phase 2, competitors will begin implementation of their MVP and should move as quickly as possible from MVP planning and program design to implementation. It is expected that by the end of Phase 2, competitors have recruited startups, successfully implemented a portion of their MVP, can speak to progress toward the metrics proposed in Phase 1, and have developed a 3-year plan to transition from MVP to full program.

Winners of Phase 2 will enter directly into negotiations with OTT for a \$1,000,000 multiyear cooperative agreement to scale their MVP. See [Section 6, Phase 2 Rules](#), for more information.

3. Cooperative Agreement:

The cooperative agreement¹⁵ will provide the winners of EPIC Phase 2 with a multiyear, stable source of funding—contingent on satisfactory performance of agreed upon goals—to scale the highest potential EPIC MVPs to support energy tech startups and grow their regional innovation ecosystems. See Section 7, Cooperative Agreements, for more information.

4. Startup Pitch Competitions:

As part of EPIC, OTT and NREL will host at least two national pitch competitions for energy-related startups. The competing startups will be nominated by EPIC winners (past and present). Competing startups must be focused on hard-tech¹⁶ development. Additional prize funds may be made available. Details on the Startup Pitch Competitions can be found in [Section 8](#).

5. Bonus Prizes:

EPIC is intended to serve as a scalable and replicable framework for efficiently deploying support to incubators serving energy entrepreneurs and startups. At any time, DOE Technical Program Offices may leverage this framework by sponsoring one or more Bonus Prizes up to \$600,000 in additional prizes. These Bonus Prizes may be added to any of the three previous categories (Prize Competition, Cooperative Agreement, or Startup Pitch Competition). Details on the Bonus Prizes can be found in [Appendix E: Bonus Prizes](#). At this time there are not any current Bonus Prizes, but they may be added at any point. Any updates will be posted on the [HeroX](#) page.

¹⁴ Minimum Viable Program (MVP): A scalable program model addressing the Program Requirements that your organization tests within the time constraints of the two-phase EPIC Program.

¹⁵ All cooperative agreements will be governed by 2CFR200 and 2CFR910.

¹⁶ Any technology solution that involves physical products or processes, including those that are chemical or biological in nature.

EPIC Overview

Competition	Prize	Total Prize Pool	Recipient
Prize Competition Phase 1	Up to 23 winners, \$150,000 cash prize each	\$3,150,000	Incubators
Prize Competition Phase 2	1 to 6* winners, up to \$1,000,000 cooperative agreement each	Up to \$6 million	Incubators
Startup Pitch Competition #1	1 st Place: \$100,000 2 nd Place: \$40,000 3 rd Place: \$20,000 Incubator that nominates 1st Place: \$25,000 \$5,000 JEDI Prize	\$190,000	Nominated Startups Nominating Incubator
Startup Pitch Competition #2	1st Place: \$50,000 2nd Place: \$20,000 3rd Place: \$10,000 Incubator that nominates 1st Place: \$25,000	\$105,000	Nominated Startups Nominating Incubator
Startup Pitch Competition #3	1st Place: \$30,000 2nd Place: \$20,000 3rd Place: \$10,000 Incubator that nominates 1st Place: \$10,000	\$70,000	Nominated Startups Nominating Incubator

*Number of awards depends on FY24 appropriations.



2.2 Cooperative Agreement

The cooperative agreement¹⁷ will provide the winners of EPIC Phase 2 with a multiyear stable source of funding contingent on satisfactory performance of agreed upon goals to scale the highest potential EPIC MVPs to support energy tech startups and grow their regional innovation ecosystems.

2.3 EPIC Startup Pitch Competitions

Competitors in the Startup Pitch Competition are *startups that are nominated* by previous EPIC winners (i.e., winners of EPIC past and present, including the FOA and prize semifinalists, finalists, and grand prize winners). Incubators do NOT participate in the Startup Pitch Competition directly; they participate by nominating a startup to compete. The first, second, and third place prizes are awarded to successful startups, not to the incubator. However, the incubator nominating the first-place winning startup in the Startup Pitch Competitions will receive a \$25,000 cash prize.

The Startup Pitch Competitions will run concurrently with the phases of EPIC. The prizes available for the Startup Pitch Competition may be augmented by Bonus Prizes. If Bonus Prizes are added, an updated version of this Official Rules document will be posted to EPIC [HeroX](#) page.

See [Section 8. Startup Pitch Competition Rules](#), for more information.

3. Program Requirements

All competitors in EPIC must address the following Program Requirements.

- A. Create New Programming – The competitor’s submission package proposes startup support

¹⁷ All cooperative agreements will be governed by 2CFR200 and 2CFR910.

services, programs, or program components that the incubator is not already pursuing *in a given region*. This also includes successful programming expanded to an underserved region in a new state.

- B. Support Startup Creation – The competitor helps startups to form and grow, with an emphasis on companies developing hard-tech¹⁸ for energy-related applications.
1. Startup formation is the development of new, viable companies. Helping startups grow could include, but is not limited to, providing meaningful assistance toward fundraising, customer discovery, or technology maturation. Startups can be at any stage of maturity.
 2. Hard-tech is defined as technology solutions that involve physical products or processes.
 3. Energy-related applications are inclusive of any solutions that improve the cost, reliability, efficiency, or secondary impacts of energy usage and systems. For example, battery storage and carbon capture are considered energy-related applications.
- C. Build Regional Partnerships – The competitor grows and strengthens local networks of energy innovation stakeholders, including mentors, investors, universities, national labs, state/local government entities, manufacturing partners, and other organizations that add value to their startups and regional communities.
1. Competitors should demonstrate how new or strengthened regional partnerships will increase opportunities for people of all racial, ethnic, socioeconomic and geographic backgrounds, sexual orientations, gender identities, and persons with disabilities; support new jobs and have positive long-term workforce implications; and support greater equity within the region.
- D. Submission packages must address at least one of the following – Teams can drive significant impact across multiple areas of interest, but competitors should consider prioritizing significant impact in a single area over a marginal impact across multiple areas. In the submission narrative, be sure to address your rationale for choosing your selected area(s).
1. *Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA)* – The competitor finds, recruits, and supports underrepresented or under supported entrepreneurs and helps startups recruit, hire, and retain employees from underrepresented backgrounds.
 - a. Please clearly illustrate how your proposed program advances DEIA principles, including any context particular to your region. Indicate who will benefit from your proposed program and how they will benefit. If applicable, include baseline metrics for your current participant companies.
 2. *Rural and Disadvantaged Communities* – The competitor provides benefits to rural and disadvantaged communities by, for example, helping startups deploy demonstration projects in collaboration with members of disadvantaged communities. DOE has developed a definition and tools to locate and identify rural and disadvantaged communities to properly align programs with the President’s Justice40 Initiative goal, that 40% of the overall benefits of certain federal investments flow to disadvantaged communities. These resources are located at <https://energyjustice.egs.anl.gov/>. DOE also recognizes disadvantaged communities as defined and identified by the White House Council on Environmental Quality’s Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST), which is located at <https://screeningtool.geoplatform.gov/>.
 - a. Please demonstrate, using quantitative and/or qualitative means, how the communities you seek to work with are rural and/or disadvantaged, as well as how you plan to ensure that proposed engagements with the community are sensitive to the needs of the community.

¹⁸ Any technology solution that involves physical products or processes, including those that are chemical or biological in nature.

3. *Lab-to-Market* – The competitor supports the commercialization of technologies developed at DOE national laboratories by, for example (but not limited to), incentivizing the creation of startups licensing intellectual property (IP) from the national labs, brokering arrangements by which an established corporate entity utilizes national lab IP or facilities, or using market-driven approaches to spur research and development in strategic technology areas. Competitors are welcome to work with any of the DOE national labs, even if a lab is not in your geographic region. A list of all DOE national labs can be found here: <https://labpartnering.org/choosing-a-lab>.
 - a. Please identify the national lab(s) you are interested in working with, why this partnership is strategic for your region, and how you plan to support the commercialization of lab technologies.
 - b. Letters of support or other evidence of productive engagement with relevant national lab stakeholders are strongly encouraged. You may contact a lab using the Lab Partnering Service link provided above.
4. *Sector-Specific Support* – The competitor develops tailored support services and programs for companies in a specific (competitor-identified) industry or technology area that is strategic for their region.
 - a. Please demonstrate why the chosen industry or technology area is strategic for your region, how your team is equipped to support the chosen industry or technology area, and what outcomes you hope to achieve.
5. *Other High-Impact Theme* – We welcome new and creative program ideas that will support the goals of EPIC. Examples may include, but are not limited to, programs focused on manufacturing or workforce development. Please explain the need for this new priority area, including a regional context for this need and how your MVP addresses this need.

All competitors are encouraged to advance DEIA among their team, partners, and advisors and should describe any such practices and efforts in their submission.

4. Eligibility

OTT welcomes incubator organizations that aid in the development of new business ventures, business accelerators, or any other organizations that self-identify as advocates for innovation and entrepreneurship to compete in EPIC. A single competitor may submit up to three submission packages as the lead entity,¹⁹ but only one submission per lead entity is eligible to win the phase. There is no limit to the number of submissions a competitor may be a partner on.

4.1 Eligible Competitors

EPIC is open to private entities (for profits and nonprofits) and academic institutions, subject to the following requirements:

- Private entities must be incorporated in and maintain a primary place of business in the United States with majority domestic ownership and control. If an entity seeking to compete does not have majority domestic ownership and control, OTT may consider issuing a waiver of that eligibility requirement where (1) the entity otherwise meets the eligibility requirements; (2) the entity is incorporated in and maintains a primary place of business in the United States; and (3) the entity submits a compelling justification. OTT may require additional information before making a determination on the waiver request.
- Academic institutions must be based in the United States.
- Programming proposed by incubators must have an emphasis on supporting startups with a hard-tech focus.
- While national laboratories are not eligible to compete, they may support teams in the competition if they are engaging the teams in compliance with lab partnership requirements.

To be eligible, the team captain will be required to sign the following statement:

I am providing this submission package as part of my participation in this competition. I understand that I am providing this submission to the Federal Government. I certify under penalty of perjury that the named competitor meets the eligibility requirements for this competition and complies with all other rules contained in the Official Rules document. I further represent that the information contained in the submission is true and contains no misrepresentations. I understand false statements or misrepresentations to the Federal Government may result in civil and/or criminal penalties under 18 U.S.C. § 1001 and § 287.

4.1.1 Phase 2 Eligibility

- Only winners of EPIC Phase 1 are eligible to compete in Phase 2.

4.1.2 Cooperative Agreement Eligibility²⁰

- Only winners of Phase 2 will be selected to move on to negotiations of the Cooperative Agreement. Non-winners of Phase 2 will be considered alternates.

4.2 Ineligible Competitors

- DOE employees, employees of sponsoring organizations, members of their immediate

¹⁹ If the lead entity is submitting multiple submissions they should have different Program Requirements.

²⁰ The cooperative agreement will be governed by 2CFR200 and 2CFR910.

families (e.g., spouses, children, siblings, or parents), and persons living in the same household as such persons, whether or not related, are not eligible to participate in the program.

- Individuals who worked at DOE (federal employees or support service contractors) within six months prior to the submission deadline of any competition are not eligible to participate in any competition in this program.
- Federal entities and federal employees are not eligible to participate in any portion of the program.
- Individual DOE national laboratory employees cannot compete in the program in their official capacity. DOE national laboratory employees may compete on their personal time but may not use any national lab resources.
- Entities and individuals publicly banned from doing business with the U.S. government such as entities and individuals debarred, suspended, or otherwise excluded from or ineligible for participating in federal programs are not eligible to compete.
- Entities and individuals identified as a restricted party on one or more screening lists of Department of Commerce, State, and the Treasury are not eligible to compete. See [Consolidated Screening List](#).
- Individuals participating in a foreign government talent recruitment program²¹ sponsored by a country of risk²² and teams that include such individuals are not eligible to compete. Participation in a foreign government talent recruitment program could conflict with this objective by resulting in unauthorized transfer of scientific and technical information to foreign government entities.
- Entities owned by, controlled by, or subject to the jurisdiction or direction of a government or a country of risk are not eligible to compete.

4.3 Startup Pitch Competition Eligibility

- Startups in the Startup Pitch Competition can be nominated by any winner of EPIC Round 1, 2, 3, or the FOA, including semifinalists, finalists, and grand prize winners of those rounds.
- Startups must be private entities incorporated in and maintain a primary place of business in the United States with majority domestic ownership and control.
- Startups must be focusing on a hard-tech energy innovation that benefits the U.S. domestic market. Startups that are solely software or a business model innovation without being part of a

²¹ Foreign Government-Sponsored Talent Recruitment Program is defined as an effort directly or indirectly organized, managed, or funded by a foreign government, or a foreign government instrumentality or entity, to recruit science and technology professionals or students (regardless of citizenship or national origin, or whether having a full-time or part-time position). Some foreign government-sponsored talent recruitment programs operate with the intent to import or otherwise acquire from abroad, sometimes through illicit means, proprietary technology or software, unpublished data and methods, and intellectual property to further the military modernization goals and/or economic goals of a foreign government. Many, but not all, programs aim to incentivize the targeted individual to relocate physically to the foreign state for the above purpose. Some programs allow for or encourage continued employment at United States research facilities or receipt of federal research funds while concurrently working at and/or receiving compensation from a foreign institution, and some direct participants not to disclose their participation to U.S. entities. Compensation could take many forms including cash, research funding, complimentary foreign travel, honorific titles, career advancement opportunities, promised future compensation, or other types of remuneration or consideration, including in-kind compensation.

²² DOE has designated the following countries as foreign countries of risk: Iran, North Korea, Russia, and China. This list is subject to change.

- hard-tech package are not eligible.
- Startups must have fewer than 500 employees.
 - Startups may not have won prizes in any of the previous EPIC Startup Pitch Competitions or Partner Pitch Competitions.
 - Startups with employee(s) or owner(s) who are also employees at a national lab are allowed to participate in the Startup Pitch Competition as long as:
 - The lab employee is not billing time to the lab for pitch competition preparations, AND
 - The startup is using only publicly available lab resources (if any at all) and paying for any lab resources it is using.

5. Phase 1 Rules

5.1 Introduction

EPIC is a funding program beginning with a two-phase prize competition that identifies incubator teams implementing high-impact ideas that support energy entrepreneurs and innovators as well as provides cash prizes to those teams that make the most progress and impact over the course of the prize competition period. In Phase 1, winners will win \$150,000. In Phase 2, winners will be invited to negotiate a cooperative agreement for up to \$1,000,000.

5.2 Goal

Competitors design a “minimum viable program” (MVP)²³ for energy entrepreneurs that focuses on the Program Requirements (see Section 3, Program Requirements). Competitors should demonstrate that they have a plan, access to the right networks, and the skills and expertise to successfully implement their MVP. During this phase, competitors should solicit and incorporate feedback from key stakeholders to ensure they can start implementing quickly in Phase 2.

5.3 How To Enter

Complete a submission package online on [HeroX](#) before the contest closing date.

5.4 Phase 1 Process

Phase 1 consists of three steps:

1. Application and Submission – Competitors incorporate all Program Requirements into their MVP design. Competitors complete their submission packages and submit online before Phase 1 ends.
2. Assessment – The Prize Administrator screens submissions for eligibility and completion and assigns expert reviewers to independently score the content of each submission. The prize judge will review the relevant submission information and determine the winners. The judging criteria assess the following competitor activities:
 - *Program Capabilities* – Demonstrate the organization’s capabilities to support energy entrepreneurs and startups and build regional partnerships. Form a plan to develop programming that addresses all Program Requirements. Identify metrics and leading indicators that will be used to evaluate your program’s success.
 - *Startup Recruitment and Pipeline* – Prove that you have or can develop a strong

²³ Minimum Viable Program (MVP): A scalable program model addressing the Program Requirements that your organization tests within the time constraints of the two-phase EPIC Incubator Funding Program.

pipeline to access energy startups and a plan for nominating startups to participate in the Startup Pitch Competitions.

- *Network, Team, and Resources* – Demonstrate that your team has the regional network and expertise to implement the plan and provide value-add to startups.
3. Announcement – After the Phase 1 winners are publicly announced, the Prize Administrator notifies them and requests the necessary information to distribute cash prizes. After winning Phase 1, competitors will implement their plan, make progress on their plan, and compete in Phase 2.

5.5 What To Submit

A complete submission package for Phase 1 should include the following items:

- Summary PowerPoint slide (will be made public)
- Cover page
- Submission narrative
- Success metrics table
- Letters of support

All documents are required unless otherwise noted. All documents must be uploaded as a PDF.

5.5.1 Summary Slide (will be made public)

Make your own public-facing, one-slide submission summary that contains information about your organization, MVP, plan for implementation, and project description to be used for public selection announcement. There is no template, so feel free to present the information as you see fit. Please make any text readable in a standard printout and conference room projection.

5.5.2 Cover Page Content

- Organization name
- Key project members (names, roles, contacts, and links to their LinkedIn profiles)
- Program requirement(s) you are addressing
- Your city, state, and nine-digit zip code
- Relevant partners and affiliates (if applicable).

5.5.3 Submission Narrative

Each of the following four questions should be addressed in the Submission Narrative deliverable. The content bullets are only suggestions to guide your responses. The individual answers to the questions do not have a word limit; however, the aggregate response to these four questions must not exceed 2,500 words at 11-point font size, not including captions, figures/graphs, or references. A word count must be included at the end of your submission (see template on [HeroX](#) for details). You may also include up to five labeled, supporting images, figures, or graphs. Additional content will not be reviewed.

Question 1 – Organization Overview - Describe your organization, team, network, and why you are qualified to implement the MVP

- Provide a brief introduction of your organization and its goals/mission
- Describe your organization's past performance, specifically around supporting startups
- Identify the key team members implementing this program and their expertise
- Describe your external advisors, advisory board, and/or regional partnerships

- Describe what practices you engage in to advance equity and inclusion among your team, partners, and advisors

Question 2 - Region and MVP Overview – *Describe the region you operate in and the program you’re going to implement*

- Describe your region and the current services available to help energy entrepreneurs
- Describe your MVP and how it adds value to supporting energy startups and regional partnerships
- Highlight any critical relationships/partnerships that will make your MVP successful
- Describe what success looks like at the end of your MVP (be as specific and tangible as possible in terms of number of people, engagements, time, etc.)
- Describe what steps you have already taken to inform your MVP design and what stakeholder engagement/discovery is still needed before implementation can begin
- Describe how the MVP and work the incubator is doing will benefit communities in your region

Question 3 – New Elements and Focus Area – *Clearly articulate what elements of your MVP are new/different from your existing programming*

- Identify the focus area of your MVP (DEIA, rural and disadvantaged communities, lab-to-market, sector-specific support, other high-impact theme) and why you are addressing that focus area
- Describe why your MVP will be successful in meeting the specific needs of this focus area
- If applying for a Bonus Prize, specifically address how your MVP meets the Bonus Prize criteria

Question 4 – Implementation Plan – *Remembering that Phase 1 ends when you submit this submission, outline your MVP implementation plan for Phase 2 and the Cooperative Agreement*

- Describe the progress made on your MVP to date (i.e., what have you done during Phase 1 toward designing, developing, and planning your MVP)
- Describe your plan for collecting and reporting on metrics for your MVP
- Define your goals for your MVP, including specific milestones
- Provide a timeline and implementation plan for your MVP, specifically highlighting when you will start interacting with startups
- Identify which portions of the MVP will be completed by the end of Phase 2 and which will be completed during the Cooperative Agreement phase
- Provide a high-level budget for your MVP implementation

5.5.4 Success Metrics Table

Because different types of incubator programming will require different types of success metrics, competitors are required to define their own Success Metrics. The Success Metrics table should not exceed two pages. In Phase 1, competitors define which metrics they intend to measure in Phase 2 as well as Cooperative Agreement targets for each metric. An optional template for the Success Metrics table can be found on [HeroX](#). See [Appendix B: Impact Tracking Metrics](#) for additional details.

- The following are suggested metrics. If you do not feel they are applicable to your organization, please include an alternate metric.
 - Number of partner organizations recruited (not including startups participating in program)
 - Number of applicants to the program
 - Number of startups in your new cohort
 - Number/type and utilization rate of interactions with startups (webinar, training session, mentorship hours, etc.)
 - Value and utilization rate of additional resources provided to startups (lab/office space, grants/stipends, etc.)

- Participant companies leveraging DOE-funded technologies
- Companies prioritizing DEIA

5.5.5 Letters of Support

Combine and upload one-page letters from relevant entities (e.g., partners, potential customers, community organizations, local government) to provide context and show the viability of the MVP as a single file. This could include letters from the partners or others you believe are critical to the success of your proposal. General statements of support are of limited value as compared to letters showing commitments to provide assistance, partner, offtake, validate, co-fund, or tangibly increase the likelihood of MVP success in some way. Any letters of commitment or support must be on letterhead, uploaded as a single file, and readable by Microsoft Word or Adobe PDF.

5.6 Assessment

The Prize Administrator screens all completed submissions and ensures the teams are eligible. The Prize Administrator then assigns eligible submissions to expert reviewers. The reviewers will include federal and nonfederal subject matter representatives with expertise in areas relevant to the competition. They will review the competitor’s submission package according to the criteria below. The scores from each reviewer will be averaged to produce a final score for the competing team/organization. This score will inform the judge’s decisions on awards. Reviewers will assess submissions against the following criteria:

Criteria	Description	Weighting
Team Composition, Capability, and Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The competitor has described a comprehensive mission and set of objectives that align with DOE’s portfolio of energy-related missions • The competitor demonstrates a strong understanding of the regional needs for serving energy entrepreneurs • The team has documented that all required team members are in place and ready to commit the time needed to accomplish the stated goals • The competitor has a successful track record of supporting entrepreneurs to launch or grow business ventures • The competitor has all the necessary experience, team, and relationships to successfully implement their MVP (please note if additional positions are required to accomplish stated goals) • The competitor has engaged in thoughtful and specific practices to advance equity and inclusion among their team, partners, and advisors • The competitor is capable and dedicated to eventually working through a contract 	30%

	negotiation with DOE for continued programming expansion	
MVP Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The competitor’s proposed MVP clearly addresses the identified need or service gap • The MVP clearly adds value and newness to the competitor’s current programming • The MVP clearly addresses one of the identified focus areas (DEIA, rural and disadvantaged communities, lab-to-market, sector-specific support, or another high-impact theme) • The MVP represents an innovative approach built on reasonable assumptions and lessons learned from other notable efforts in this space • The competitor proposes relevant, ambitious, yet achievable success metrics for their MVP • The MVP creates new programming in the region or expands incubator program offerings to a new region • The competitor describes the extent to which the MVP and work the incubator is doing benefits communities in the region 	30%
Implementation Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The competitor has already begun to collect feedback on the viability of the MVP design • The competitor is ready to begin MVP implementation at the beginning of Phase 2 • The competitor’s implementation plan is ambitious and will result in engaged startups by the end of Phase 2 • The competitor has a plan on how the MVP will scale up during the Cooperative Agreement phase 	30%
Reviewer Recommendation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The competitor should be strongly considered for a Phase 1 prize (yes/no) 	10%

5.7 Interviews

DOE, at its sole discretion, may decide to hold a short interview with a subset of the Phase 1 competitors. Interviews would be held prior to the announcement of winners and would serve to help clarify questions the judge may have. Attending interviews is not required, and interviews are not an indication of winning.

5.8 Final Determination

DOE will designate a federal employee as the judge before the final determination of the winners. Final determination of the winners by the judge will consider the reviewers' feedback and scores, application of [program policy factors](#), and the interview findings (if applicable).

5.9 Announcement

Approximately 60 days after Phase 1 closes, the Prize Administrator will publicly announce the winners and request the necessary information from winners to distribute prizes.

Please read and comply with additional requirements about your submission in Appendix A: Additional Terms and Conditions.

COMPETITORS WHO DO NOT COMPLY WITH THESE REQUIREMENTS MAY BE DISQUALIFIED.

6. Phase 2 Rules

6.1 Introduction

Feedback from EPIC participants (both winners and competitors) as well as the *Commercialization Programs RFI* indicated that incubators benefit from quick injections of capital to try new, higher risk ideas and stable long-term funding to scale what is working. This new approach encourages bold and impactful ideas and rewards performance to maximize the overall impact of a limited source of funds. The prize portion allows a lower barrier of entry for new and less established entities, while offering new and established entities the opportunity to try new things quickly and efficiently. The two-phase prize structure allows competitors to create and implement MVPs and allows DOE to pilot test projects.

The prize competition of EPIC serves a dual purpose in (1) identifying the winners of the two-phase prize competition and (2) facilitating the competitive selection process under the FOA (DE-FOA-000-3182), which will result in an invitation to negotiate a cooperative agreement,²⁴ a stable 3-year funding totaling up to \$1,000,000 per selectee.²⁵

6.2 Goal

Competitors demonstrate *significant progress* in implementing their MVP and provide documentation that the program can replicate and scale. The Phase 2 winners should show they will be able to scale the MVP during the up to 3-year cooperative agreement.²⁶

6.3 How To Enter

Complete a submission package online at [HeroX](#) before the competition closing date.

²⁴ The cooperative agreement will be governed by 2CFR200 and 2CFR910.

²⁵ Winners of Phase 2 are referred to as "selectees" as they are selected to enter into negotiations for a cooperative agreement.

²⁶ The cooperative agreement will be governed by 2CFR200 and 2CFR910.

6.4 Phase 2 Process

Phase 2 consists of the following steps:

1. Activation and Submission – Competitors have made *significant progress* toward the completion of their MVP and provide documentation that the program will be sustained post-EPIC in addition to plans for replication or scaling in the future. Competitors complete their submission package by the Phase 2 deadline.
2. Startup Pitch Competition Nomination – Competitors are encouraged to nominate a startup to compete in the Startup Pitch Competitions. The reviewer scores from the pitch competition and the associated quality of the startup may be considered by the judge for Phase 2.
3. Assessment – The Prize Administrator screens submissions for eligibility and completion and assigns expert reviewers to independently score the content of each submission. The prize judge will review the relevant submission information and determine the winners. The judging criteria used to assess competitor activities are listed in [Section 6.6 Assessment](#).
4. Interview Day – Participate in an interview session with the panel of reviewers to provide additional details on your MVP completion and future plans.
5. Selection and Invitation – Winners will receive a notification they have been competitively selected to negotiate a cooperative agreement. All competitors submitting in Phase 2 must be capable and dedicated to working with DOE to negotiate the terms of this agreement if they win this phase. Non-winners will be considered alternates.
6. Announcement – After the finalists are publicly announced, OTT will start the cooperative agreement negotiation process.

6.5 What To Submit

A complete submission package for Phase 2 should include the following items:

- Summary PowerPoint slide (public)
- Cover page
- Progress narrative
- Updated success metrics table
- Future plans documentation
 - Future plans narrative
 - Proposed cooperative agreement²⁷ SOPO (not to exceed 3 pages)
 - Proposed cooperative agreement budget estimate, including at least 20% cost share
- Partner letters of commitment
- SF-424
- SF-LLL

All documents are required unless otherwise noted. All documents must be uploaded as a PDF.

6.5.1 Summary Slide (will be made public)

Make your own public-facing, one-slide submission summary that contains information about your organization, MVP, progress made on implementation, and project description to be used for public

²⁷ The cooperative agreement will be governed by 2CFR200 and 2CFR910.

selection announcement. There is no template, so feel free to present the information as you see fit. Please make any text readable in a standard printout and conference room projection.

6.5.2 Cover Page

- Organization name
- Key project members (names, contacts, and links to their LinkedIn profiles)
- Program Requirement(s) you are addressing
- Your city, state, and nine-digit zip code
- Relevant partners and affiliates (if applicable).

6.5.3 Progress Narrative

The content bullets below are only suggestions to guide your responses. Responses do not have a word limit; however, the aggregate response must not exceed three pages at 11-point font size, not including captions, figures/graphs, or references. A word count must be included at the end of your submission (see template for details). You may also include up to five supporting images, figures, or graphs. The reviewers will score the questions based on the content you have provided. Additional content will not be reviewed.

1. Organization and MVP Overview – *Briefly describe your organization, the context in which you are working, and your MVP.*

- Provide a brief introduction of your organization and its goals/mission
- Identify the key team members implementing this program, their expertise, and any changes made to the team during Phase 2
- Describe your MVP, the focus area it addressed, and how it adds value to supporting energy startups and regional partnerships
- Describe what you have learned about your region's specific challenges and the focus area during Phase 2
- Briefly describe your regional context, the challenges faced supporting energy startups and entrepreneurs, and the program requirement area(s) you are targeting, including the required emphasis on supporting hard-tech companies
- Describe what you have learned about these challenges and program requirement areas during Phase 2

2. Minimum Viable Program (MVP) Results – *Describe progress you have made toward the completion of your MVP*

- Describe the progress you made toward MVP completion during Phase 2 and if you were able to meet or exceed your planned goals. Include a brief description of any project pivots
- Highlight key activities, relationships, and milestones completed during Phase 2
- Evaluate if and how your MVP successfully addressed the program requirement area(s)
- Provide any context on your progress toward metrics, including brief explanations of any metrics that were not met
- Identify lessons learned from your MVP implementation and what advice you would give another incubator looking to implement a similar program
- Identify what specific factors led to the success of your MVP in your regional context that other incubators should consider if they were to implement similar programming in a

comparable context

- Discuss how you identified your nominated startup for the Pitch Competition and what support you offered this startup.

6.5.4 Updated Success Metrics Table

Competitors are required to provide an updated Success Metrics table. The updated table should show the metric originally proposed in Phase 1 and the metrics actually achieved during Phase 2. An optional Success Metrics table template is available on the [HeroX](#) website.

6.5.5 Future Plans Documentation

The Future Plans documentation consists of three parts—a Future Plans Narrative, a Statement of Project Objectives (SOPo), and a Proposed Cooperative Agreement Budget Estimate.

1. Future Plans Narrative: *Your Future Plans Narrative must not exceed three pages, inclusive of any figures or tables you wish to include. The following is suggested content for the narrative:*
 - a. Describe your plans and timeline to complete your MVP implementation
 - b. Describe what the scale-up of your MVP into a full program would look like during the Cooperative Agreement phase
 - c. Describe what changes would be made to the program moving forward, based on lessons learned during the program
 - d. Identify your goals for the program at 1 year, 3 years, and 5 years

2. Statement of Project Objectives (SOPo): *Competitors are required to complete a SOPo outline.*

A SOPo outline template is available on [HeroX](#). The SOPo outline, including the Go/No-Go Table, must not exceed 3 pages when printed using standard 8.5 x 11 paper with 1" margins (top, bottom, left, and right) with font not smaller than 11 point. SOPos should indicate your cooperative agreement project period of performance between 1 and 3 years, include task titles with a short description, annual Go/No-Go milestones and end of project goals, which will be required during award negotiations.

- a. DOE is committed to investments that deliver benefits to the American public; that foster sustainable, resilient, and equitable access to clean energy. As such, projects should (1) advance diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA); (2) contribute to energy equity; and (3) create quality jobs and invest in America's workforce. To ensure these objectives are met, the SOPo should describe how it will support these objectives, including at least one SMART (which stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timely) milestone per budget period supported by metrics that measure the success of the proposed activities.
3. Proposed Cooperative Agreement Budget Estimate²⁸: Competitors are required to complete a cooperative agreement budget estimate. A template for the proposed cooperative agreement budget estimate is available on [HeroX](#). The budget estimate is a breakdown of the high-level budget proposal contained in the SF-424. It provides the level of cost detail necessary to facilitate a thorough review of proposed costs. It should show how you plan to allocate the project budget (up to \$1,000,000) if you win Phase 2 and will help expedite the negotiation process. Please note if you plan to have sub-awardees on your cooperative agreement (identify organization name, description of the scope of work, name of the project leader, and estimated total costs).

²⁸ Also known as "Budget Justification Workbook."

- a. Cost Share 20%
 - i. The cost share must be at least 20% of the total allowable costs for research and development projects (i.e., the sum of the government share, including FFRDC and GOGO costs if applicable, and the recipient share of allowable costs equals the total allowable cost of the project) and must come from non-federal sources unless otherwise allowed by law. (See 2 CFR 200.306 and 2 CFR 910.130 for the applicable cost sharing requirements.) Please include a sentence confirming that you agree to this cost share requirement. See [Appendix C: Cost Share](#) for more cost share information.

6.5.6 Letters of Commitment

Combine and upload one-page letters from relevant entities (e.g., partners, potential customers, community organizations, local government) to provide context and show the viability of the project as a single file. This could include letters from partners or others you believe are critical to the success of your proposal. Letters should show commitments to provide assistance, partner, offtake, validate, co-fund, or tangibly increase the likelihood of MVP success in some way. Any letters of commitment must be on letterhead, uploaded as a single file, and readable by Microsoft Word or Adobe PDF.

6.5.7 SF-424: Application for Federal Assistance

This document: [SF-424, "Application for Federal Assistance"](#) is required to be considered for the cooperative agreement. Complete all required fields in accordance with the instructions on the form. The list of certifications and assurances in Field 21 can be found at <http://energy.gov/management/office-management/operational-management/financial-assistance/financial-assistance-forms>, under Certifications and Assurances. Note: The dates and dollar amounts on the SF-424 are for the complete cooperative agreement project period and not just the first project year, first phase, or other subset of the project period.

6.5.8 SF-LLL: Disclosure of Lobbying Activities

This document: [SF-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities"](#) is required to be considered for the cooperative agreement. Prime recipients and subrecipients may not use any federal funds to influence or attempt to influence, directly or indirectly, congressional action on any legislative or appropriation matters.

Prime recipients and subrecipients are required to complete and submit SF-LLL to ensure that non-federal funds have not been paid and will not be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence any of the following in connection with the application:

- An officer or employee of any federal agency;
- A Member of Congress;
- An officer or employee of Congress; or
- An employee of a Member of Congress.

6.5.10 Additional Requirements

All competitors are required to comply with the additional requirements found in [Appendix A: Additional Terms and Conditions](#).

6.6 Assessment

The Prize Administrator screens all completed submissions and ensures the teams are eligible. The Prize Administrator then assigns eligible submissions to expert reviewers. The reviewers will include federal and nonfederal subject matter representatives with expertise in areas relevant to the competition. They will review the competitor's submission package according to the criteria below. The scores from each

reviewer will be averaged to produce a final score for the competing team/organization. This score will inform the judge's decisions on awards. Reviewers will assess submissions against the following criteria:

Criteria	Description	Weighting
Organizational Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The competitor has taken concrete action to demonstrate that implementation and continuation of the MVP is a priority and adds value to the organization • The competitor has demonstrated expanded knowledge, capacity, and networks to successfully implement a full version of the MVP during the Cooperative Agreement phase • The competitor significantly advanced their understanding of the program areas during Phase 2 	30%
MVP Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The competitor has made significant progress toward the implementation of their MVP • The competitor successfully met all, or most, of the success metrics proposed during Phase 1 • The competitor has successfully engaged with their intended audience • The MVP clearly addresses one of the identified focus areas (DEIA, rural and disadvantaged communities, lab-to-market, sector-specific support, other high-impact theme) • The competitor made any necessary changes to their MVP quickly and efficiently • The competitor provided sufficient quantitative measurements to evaluate success of their MVP implementation • The MVP creates new programming in the region or expands incubator program offerings to a new region 	30%
Future Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The competitor presents an ambitious, but realistic, plan to complete their MVP and implement a full program during the Cooperative Agreement phase • The competitor explains the extent to which the regional communities could benefit through scaling MVP • There is a high probability the competitor will be successful in both their project negotiation with DOE, and their project execution, if they win Phase 2 	30%

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If successful, the short-term and long-term goals have a significant impact on the support available for energy entrepreneurs • The competitor proposes a reasonable budget and appropriate cost share for future implementation during the Cooperative Agreement phase 	
Reviewer Recommendation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The competitor should be strongly considered for a Phase 2 prize (yes/no) 	10%

6.7 Interviews

The Prize Administrator will hold a short interview with some, or all, of the Phase 2 competitors. Interviews will be held prior to the announcement of winners and will serve to help clarify questions the judge may have. Attending interviews is required, and interviews are not an indication of winning.

6.8 Final Determination

DOE will designate a federal employee as the judge and selection official before the final determination of the winners. Final determination of the winners by the judge and selection official will consider the reviewers' feedback and scores, application of [program policy factors](#), and the interview findings. Pitch competition participation may also be considered.

6.9 Announcement

Approximately 30 days after Phase 2 closes, the Prize Administrator will publicly announce the winners. If you are not a winner, you are not selected for the cooperative agreement at this time. The winners will then be contacted directly by OTT to begin negotiations for the cooperative agreement.

7. Cooperative Agreements²⁹

7.1 Goal

Provide a multiyear stable source of funding to scale the highest potential EPIC MVPs to support energy tech startups and grow their regional innovation ecosystems.

7.2 How To Enter

Only winners of Phase 2 will be selected to move on to negotiations of the cooperative agreement and will be referred to as "selectees." If both DOE and the selectee come to agreeable terms, a cooperative agreement will be issued to the selectee.

7.3 Cooperative Agreement Process

Selectees from Phase 2 will be provided with a schedule for award negotiations upon winning Phase 2. During negotiations, each winner of Phase 2 will work with OTT to refine their SOPO and budget submitted in Phase 2. Failure to meet the specific and rapid deadlines stated in the schedule may result in the termination of award negotiations and the selection of an alternate. Typically, this means the principal

²⁹ The cooperative agreement will be governed by 2CFR200 and 2CFR910.

investigator (PI) for the selectee may need to participate in an hour phone call every other business day at a minimum and be able to turn around document changes before each call.

Separately, the Contracting Officer or their representative will review the proposed budget for the project and work with the selectee to resolve any issues relating to the budget. The Contracting Officer is required to make certain determinations before executing the award, such as assessing the selectee's financial management and project management capabilities and reviewing the proposed cost share for the project.

The Contracting Officer is required to perform a financial management assessment to assess the Selectee's ability to manage the financial aspects of an award and the plans to accomplish project activities with reasonable economy and efficiency. The standards for acceptable financial management systems are found at 10 CFR 600.121 for universities and nonprofits and at 10 CFR 600.311 for for-profit organizations.

7.4 Award Overview

7.4.1 OTT Funding Agreements

Through cooperative agreements, OTT provides financial and other support to projects that have the potential to realize funding program objectives. OTT does not use such agreements to acquire property or services for the direct benefit or use of the United States government.

7.4.2 Estimated Funding

Given the timing of the program release, fiscal year 2023 funds are available and have been committed to this program (ensuring at least one phase 2 cooperative agreement). Should fiscal year 2024 funding become available that is aligned with the goals of this program, additional awards may be selected under this funding program. In 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023, OTT received \$5 million to support EPIC each year; however, future appropriations are not yet known. OTT anticipates making between 1 and 6 cooperative agreements depending on the availability of FY24 funding. OTT may issue one, multiple, or no awards. Individual awards may be up to \$1,000,000.

OTT may establish more than one budget period for each award and fund only the initial budget period(s). Funding for all budget periods, including the initial budget period, is not guaranteed.

7.4.3 Period of Performance

OTT anticipates making awards that will run up to 36 months in length. Typically, OTT will review project performance on an annual basis and decide to continue funding or not. A decision to continue funding will be contingent upon the recipient's satisfactory performance. The end of these budget periods are also referred to as Go/No-Go decision points. To determine satisfactory performance, OTT will evaluate project performance, project schedule adherence, the extent to which milestone objectives are met, compliance with reporting requirements, and overall contribution to the program goals and objectives. As a result of this evaluation, OTT may, at its discretion, authorize the following actions: (1) continue to fund the project, contingent upon the availability of funds appropriated by Congress for the purpose of this program and the availability of future-year budget authority; (2) recommend redirection of work under the project; (3) place a hold on federal funding for the project, pending further supporting data or funding; or (4) discontinue funding the project because of insufficient progress, change in strategic direction, or lack of funding.

Given the importance of Go/No-Go points, great care should be taken in the draft summary SOPO that is part of the submission package as it is a critical aspect of the overall project.

7.5 What To Submit for Cooperative Agreement Negotiations

The cooperative agreement negotiation process will consist of several meetings to negotiate the terms of the cooperative agreement. This includes the statement of project work, budget, and other contractual requirements.

The negotiation period will consist of the following elements:

1. State of Project Objectives (SOP0)
2. Budget justification
3. Summary abstract for public release
4. Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and System for Award Management (SAM) registration
5. FedConnect registration
6. At least 20% cost share

Companies selected for negotiation of an award will be held to specific and rapid turnaround times during the award negotiation process. DOE may terminate award negotiations with selectees that are not able to meet required deadlines.

7.5.1 Statement of Project Objectives (SOP0)

Selectees are required to expand and add details to the SOP0 outline submitted in Phase 2. An updated metrics table will also be incorporated into the SOP0. A SOP0 template is available on [HeroX](#). SOP0s should include detailed task and subtask descriptions, semi-annual deliverables, and metrics.

- a. DOE is committed to investments that deliver benefits to the American public; that foster sustainable, resilient, and equitable access to clean energy. As such, projects should (1) advance diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA); (2) contribute to energy equity; and (3) create quality jobs and invest in America's workforce. To ensure these objectives are met, the SOP0 should describe how it will support these objectives, including at least one SMART milestone per budget period supported by metrics that measure the success of the proposed activities.

7.5.2 Budget Estimate Workbook³⁰

Selectees are required to update the Budget Estimate submitted in Phase 2. This form is available on [HeroX](#). Selectees must complete each tab of the budget workbook for the project as a whole, including all work to be performed by the prime recipient and its subrecipients and contractors. Selectees should include costs associated with required annual audits and incurred cost proposals in their proposed budget documents. The data fields in the "Instructions and Summary" tab of the budget workbook will auto-populate as the selectee enters information into the Workbook. Selectees must carefully read the "Instructions and Summary" tab provided within the Budget Justification Workbook.

7.5.3 Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and System for Award Management (SAM)

Each selectee (unless an individual or federal awarding agency that is excepted from those requirements under 2 CFR 25.110(b) or (c), or has an exception approved by the federal awarding agency under 2 CFR 25.110(d)) is required to: (1) Be registered in the SAM at <https://www.sam.gov> before submitting its application; (2) provide a valid UEI in its application; and (3) continue to maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which it has an active federal award or an application or plan under consideration by a federal awarding agency. DOE may not make a federal award to a selectee until the selectee has complied with all applicable UEI and SAM requirements and, if an

³⁰ Also known as "Budget Justification Workbook"

applicant has not fully complied with the requirements by the time DOE is ready to make a federal award, DOE will determine that the applicant is not qualified to receive a federal award and use that determination as a basis for making a federal award to another applicant.

7.5.4 FedConnect

Register in FedConnect at <https://www.fedconnect.net>. To create an organization account, your organization's SAM MPIN is required. For more information about the SAM MPIN or other registration requirements, review the FedConnect Ready, Set, Go! Guide at https://www.fedconnect.net/FedConnect/Marketing/Documents/FedConnect_Ready_Set_Go.pdf.

7.5.5 Cost Share

The cost share must be at least 20% of the total allowable costs for research and development projects (i.e., the sum of the government share, including FFRDC and GOGO costs if applicable, and the recipient share of allowable costs equals the total allowable cost of the project) and must come from non-federal sources unless otherwise allowed by law. (See 2 CFR 200.306 and 2 CFR 910.130 for the applicable cost sharing requirements.) See [Appendix C: Cost Share](#) for more details on cost share.

7.5.6 Award Administrative Requirements

The administrative requirements for DOE grants and cooperative agreements are contained in 2 CFR Part 200 as amended by 2 CFR Part 910.

i. Subaward and Executive Reporting

Additional administrative requirements necessary for DOE grants and cooperative agreements to comply with the Federal Funding and Transparency Act of 2006 (FFATA) are contained in 2 CFR Part 170. Prime recipients must register with the new FFATA Subaward Reporting System database and report the required data on their first tier subrecipients. Prime recipients must report the executive compensation for their own executives as part of their registration profile in SAM.

ii. National Policy Requirements

The National Policy Assurances that are incorporated as a term and condition of award are located at: <http://www.nsf.gov/awards/managing/rtc.jsp>.

iii. Environmental Review in Accordance with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

OTT's decision whether and how to distribute federal funds under this FOA is subject to NEPA (42 U.S.C. 4321, *et seq.*). NEPA requires federal agencies to integrate environmental values into their decision-making processes by considering the potential environmental impacts of their proposed actions. For additional background on NEPA, please see DOE's NEPA website, at <https://www.energy.gov/nepa>.

While NEPA compliance is a federal agency responsibility and the ultimate decisions remain with the federal agency, all recipients selected for an award will be required to assist in the timely and effective completion of the NEPA process in the manner most pertinent to their proposed project. If DOE determines certain records must be prepared to complete the NEPA review process (e.g., biological evaluations or environmental assessments), the recipient may be required to prepare the records and the costs to prepare the necessary records may be included as part of the project costs.

iv. Statement of Federal Stewardship

OTT will exercise normal federal stewardship in overseeing the project activities performed under OTT awards. Stewardship activities include, but are not limited to, conducting site visits; reviewing performance and financial reports; providing assistance and/or temporary intervention in unusual circumstances to correct deficiencies that develop during the project; ensuring compliance with terms

and conditions; and reviewing technical performance after project completion to ensure that the project objectives have been accomplished.

v. Statement of Substantial Involvement

OTT has substantial involvement in work performed under awards made as a result of this FOA. OTT does not limit its involvement to the administrative requirements of the award. Instead, OTT has substantial involvement in the direction and redirection of the technical aspects of the project as a whole. Substantial involvement includes, but is not limited to, the following:

1. OTT shares responsibility with the recipient for the management, control, direction, and performance of the project.
2. OTT may intervene in the conduct or performance of work under this award for programmatic reasons. Intervention includes the interruption or modification of the conduct or performance of project activities.
3. OTT may redirect or discontinue funding the project based on the outcome of OTT's evaluation of the project at the Go/No-Go decision point(s).
4. OTT participates in major project decision-making processes.

8. Startup Pitch Competition Rules

8.1 Introduction

The Startup Pitch Competition is a national pitch competition that identifies the best energy-related startups, nominated by any winner in EPIC (past and present, including the FOA and prize semifinalists, finalists, and grand prize winners). Cash prizes will be awarded for first, second, and third place. Additionally, the incubator who nominates the first-place startup will also receive a cash prize. These prizes could be augmented by Bonus Prizes (see [Appendix E: Bonus Prizes](#) for more info). Startup Pitch Competitions may be held in conjunction with EPIC or as a stand-alone event, and may be in-person or virtual. **A minimum of** two Startup Pitch Competitions will be held during EPIC Round 3.

The Prize Administrator may contract with an external organization ("Pitch Host") to host the Pitch Competition. The hosting organization may not nominate a startup to compete in the competition they are hosting.

8.1.1 Startup Pitch Competition #1

Startup Pitch Competition #1 will take place in Summer 2024. The DOE Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU) will provide additional funding for first, second, and third place prizes and support a JEDI prize, a prize focused on Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. [Section 8.5.1 Pitch Competition Evaluation Criteria](#) provides additional detail on how the JEDI Prize will be scored. ONLY startups participating in the live pitch competition are eligible for the additional JEDI Prize.

If selected for Startup Pitch Competition #1, the startups must be willing and able to attend and pitch at the DOE Small Business Forum and Expo in Minneapolis, MN, June 4-5, 2024. OSDBU will cover the cost of conference registration for the Small Business Forum for two representatives from the selected startups.

The total amounts, and funding source, for the Startup Pitch Competition #1 are listed below:

Award	Total Prize Amount	Funding Source
First Place	\$100,000	DOE OTT: \$50,000 DOE OSDBU: \$50,000
Second Place	\$40,000	DOE OTT: \$20,000 DOE OSDBU: \$20,000
Third Place	\$20,000	DOE OTT: \$10,000 DOE OSDBU: \$10,000
JEDI Prize	\$5,000	DOE OSDBU: \$5,000
Incubator Award	\$25,000	DOE OTT: \$25,000

8.1.2 Startup Pitch Competition #2

Details for Startup Pitch Competition #2, scheduled to take place in Fall 2024, will be added to an updated version of this Official Rules document and will be posted to EPIC Round 3 [HeroX](#) page when this information is available.

8.1.3 Startup Pitch Competition #3

Startup Pitch Competition #3 was added to the EPIC Prize in Spring 2024 and will take place in May 2024. ONLY EPIC Round 1 FOA awardees can nominate a startup to Pitch Competition #3.

If selected for Startup Pitch Competition #3, the startups must be willing and able to attend and pitch at the DOE Office of Technology Transitions EPIC FOA event in Washington, D.C., on May 9, 2024.

The total amounts, and funding source, for the Startup Pitch Competition #3 are listed below:

Award	Total Prize Amount	Funding Source
First Place	\$30,000	DOE OTT: \$30,000
Second Place	\$20,000	DOE OTT: \$20,000
Third Place	\$10,000	DOE OTT: \$10,000
Incubator Award	\$10,000	DOE OTT: \$10,000

8.2 Goal

Nominated startups will showcase their business ideas for the opportunity to win a cash prize. Startups must be focusing on a hard-tech energy innovation that benefits the U.S. domestic market. Startups that are solely software or a business model innovation without a hard-tech component are not eligible.

8.3 How To Enter

All incubators that participated in EPIC Prize Rounds 1, 2, or 3, as well as the EPIC FOA are eligible to nominate startups to the Startup Pitch Competitions #1 and #2. Only EPIC Round 1 FOA awardees can nominate a startup to Pitch Competition #3. Nominated startups will receive an invitation from the Pitch Host. Incubators may use whatever process they deem best to determine who to nominate, but only startups with fewer than 500 employees are eligible to compete in the competition. Each incubator can only nominate ONE startup per pitch competition.

8.4 Pitch Competition Process

1. Pitch Competition Announcement – The Prize Administrator announces the host and format for the upcoming Pitch Competition. Pitch Competitions may be held as virtual or in- person events, as determined by the Prize Administrator³¹ and Pitch Host.
2. Startup Nominations – Eligible incubators each nominate one startup to compete in the Pitch Competition. The startup must agree to participate (step 4) in order to receive the nomination. If multiple incubators nominate the same startup, nominations will be processed on a first-come-first-served basis. The Prize Administrator reserves the right to down select the number of teams participating in the Pitch Competition (see step 6).
3. Invitation to Compete – The Pitch Host invites nominated startups to participate in the Pitch Competition.
4. Participation Confirmation – Startups accept their nominations by confirming their participation and providing a brief overview of their technology and company before the deadline set by the Pitch Host.
5. Virtual Pitch Submission – By the deadline set by the Pitch Host, nominated startups must submit their Virtual Pitch Submission. This submission will include:
 - A 5-minute pitch video addressing the scoring criteria below.
 - Self-certification that the startup meets the eligibility requirements.
 - This video may, at the discretion of the Prize Administrator, be shared publicly. If a startup does not accept its nomination or withdraws before the deadline, the incubator may nominate a new startup so long as the startup accepts the nomination by the deadline set by the Pitch Host.
6. Submission Evaluation and Selection – All Virtual Pitch Submissions will be evaluated through the process described below. A subset of the startups will be selected to pitch. Each selected startup (“Finalist”) will receive a \$1,000 prize and be invited to participate in the Pitch Competition Finals.
7. Competition Preparation – The startup prepares its pitch. The Pitch Host provides at least one webinar or preparation session for startups.
8. Pitch Competition Finals – Finalist startups participate in the Pitch Competition Finals and are scored by a panel of expert reviewers.
9. Winners Announcement – Pitch Competition winners will be announced at the conclusion of the event. After the winners are publicly announced, the Prize Administrator notifies them and requests the necessary information to distribute cash prizes.

8.5 Pitch Competition Evaluation Criteria

³¹ The National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) serves as the Prize Administrator for American-Made Challenges.

For Startup Pitch Competition #1, six selected finalists will be invited to do a live pitch at the DOE Small Business Forum and Expo in Minneapolis, MN June 4-5, 2024. Each startup will be given 7 minutes to pitch. The final format and allotted time will be provided by the pitch host and described in the Invitation to Compete. The startup should have a clear understanding of their technology, the market, the business model to commercialize the technology, and how their product and efforts can help advance equity, inclusion, and disadvantaged communities. Details on Startup Pitch Competition #2 will be provided closer to the event.

For Startup Pitch Competition #3, up to 10 startups will be invited to do a live pitch at the Office of Technology Transitions EPIC FOA event in Washington, D.C., on May 9, 2024. Each startup will be given 5 minutes to pitch. The startup should have a clear understanding of their technology, the market, the business model to commercialize the technology, and how their product and efforts can help advance equity, inclusion, and disadvantaged communities.

Startups will be evaluated across six different categories for first, second, and third place awards. Each category has a series of criteria the reviewers will consider when assigning a single score for that category, according to the scale below:

1	2	3	4	5	6
strongly disagree	disagree	slightly disagree	slightly agree	agree	strongly agree

Startups will receive a single score for the following six categories:

Category	Criteria Statements	Score (1-6)
Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The startup presents an impactful energy solution The technology represents an innovative approach built on reasonable assumptions, valid technical foundations, and lessons learned from other notable efforts in the space 	
Market Opportunity and Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The startup has a strong understanding of the potential market The target market segment is large enough to create an investable opportunity 	
Business Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The value proposition is clearly articulated The startup is pursuing a compelling solution that will lead to a sustainable business with paying customers 	
Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The team’s track record demonstrates notable entrepreneurial qualities such as adaptability, creativity, decisiveness, and resourcefulness The team has the knowledge, experience, and determination to transform their technology into a viable business in the near future The team has engaged in thoughtful and specific activities to advance equity and inclusion, including for disadvantaged communities³² (e.g., those that are affected by persistent poverty, job loss due to the energy transition, etc.) 	

Investment Potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The startup has demonstrated the ability to attract investment capital or grant funding • The assumptions used to estimate ROI are reasonable 	
Presentation and Overall Impression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The presenter effectively communicated their startup’s innovation and business plan • This startup should be strongly considered to win the Pitch Competition 	
<i>Total Score</i>		___/36

8.5.1 Pitch Competition #1 JEDI Prize

In addition to first, second, and third place awards, a \$5,000 Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) Prize is being included in Startup Pitch Competition #1. This award will be a separate scored award, included as part of the live pitch competition. Each reviewer will assign a score of 1 to 10 to the pitch (with 10 being the highest possible score) based on the JEDI Prize criteria outlined below. DOE recognizes disadvantaged communities as those with census tracts identified by the White House Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST), which is located at <https://screeningtool.geoplatform.gov/>. DOE will award the JEDI award to a startup finalist taking into account the reviewer scores.

³² Disadvantaged communities are those experiencing one or more of the following: Low income, high and/or persistent poverty; High unemployment and underemployment; Racial and ethnic residential segregation, particularly where the segregation stems from discrimination by government entities; Linguistic isolation; High housing cost burden and substandard housing; Distressed neighborhoods; High transportation cost burden and/or low transportation access; Disproportionate environmental stressor burden and high cumulative impacts; Limited water and sanitation access and affordability; Disproportionate impacts from climate change; High energy cost burden and low energy access; Jobs lost through the energy transition; Lack of access to healthcare.

Category	JEDI Prize Criteria Statements	Score (1-10)
JEDI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Team is pursuing an innovative and compelling solution to expand clean energy technology in disadvantaged communities The competitor quantifies a critical JEDI problem, and their assessment of current solutions shows a comprehensive understanding of the opportunity space The team is uniquely capable of addressing issues of clean energy adoption in disadvantaged communities The JEDI goals are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely 	
Total Score		___/10

8.6 How Pitch Competition Winners Are Determined

A panel of reviewers chosen by the Pitch Host will evaluate the startups based on the categories above. In the first, second and third place award criteria categories listed above, each competitor will receive a score from 1 to 6; each of the categories are equally weighted. The final score from an individual reviewer equals the total sum of the scores for all the sections. All reviewers' scores will then be averaged for a final reviewer score for the pitch.

For Startup Pitch Competition #1, the JEDI Award will be scored separately on a 1-10 scale. All reviewers' scores will then be averaged for a final JEDI reviewer score for the pitch.

Immediately following the conclusion of the pitches, the reviewers will meet to recommend winners. The final judge, a representative of OTT, will make the final selection of winners based on the scores and recommendation of the reviewer panel.

Appendix A: Additional Terms and Conditions

A.1 Universal Contest Requirements

Your submission for EPIC is subject to the following terms and conditions:

- You must post the final content of your submission or upload the submission form online at [HeroX](#) before the program closes. OTT will not accept late submissions or any other form of submission.
- You must mark all submissions that you wish to protect from public disclosure according to the instructions later in this section. Unmarked or improperly marked submissions will be deemed to have been provided with unlimited rights and may be used in any manner and for any purpose whatsoever.
- You must include all the required submission elements. The Prize Administrator may

disqualify your submission after an initial screening if you fail to provide all required submission elements. Competitors may be given an opportunity to rectify non-substantive submission errors due to technical challenges with the submission platform, including late submissions due to a system glitch.

- Your submission must be in English and in a format readable by Microsoft Word or Adobe PDF. Scanned hand-written submissions will be disqualified.
- DOE or NREL will disqualify submissions if they contain any matter that, in their sole discretion, is indecent, obscene, defamatory, libelous, lacking in professionalism, or demonstrates a lack of respect for people or life on this planet.
- Your clicking “Accept” on the HeroX platform and proceeding to register for the contest described in this document forms a valid and binding agreement between you and the U.S. Department of Energy and is in addition to the existing HeroX Terms of Use for all purposes relating to its contests. You should print and keep a copy of these rules, which apply only to the contest described here and to no other contest on the HeroX platform or anywhere else.
- You will be required to sign the following statement as part of your submission to this program:

I am providing this submission package as part of my participation in this competition. I understand that the information contained in this submission will be relied on by the federal government to determine whether to issue a prize to the named competitor. I certify under penalty of perjury that the named competitor meets the eligibility requirements for this competition and complies with all other rules contained in the Official Rules document. I further represent that the information contained in the submission is true and contains no misrepresentations. I understand false statements or misrepresentations to the federal government may result in civil and/or criminal penalties under 18 U.S.C. § 1001 and § 287, and 31 U.S.C. §§ 3729-3733 and 3801-3812.

A.2 Verification for Payments

The Prize Administrator will verify the identity and the role of a participant potentially qualified to receive the prizes. Receiving a prize payment is contingent upon fulfilling all requirements contained herein. The Prize Administrator will notify winning competitors using provided email contact information after the date that results are announced. Each competitor (or parent/guardian if under 18 years of age), will be required to sign and return to the Prize Administrator, within 15 days of the date the notice is sent, a completed National Renewable Energy Laboratory Request for ACH Banking Information form and a completed W9 form (<https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/fw9.pdf>). At the sole discretion of the Prize Administrator, a winning competitor will be disqualified from the competition and receive no prize funds if: (i) the person/entity cannot be contacted; (ii) the person/entity fails to sign and return the required documentation within the required time period; (iii) the notification is returned as undeliverable; or (iv) the submission or person/entity is disqualified for any other reason.

A.3 Teams and Single-Entity Awards

The Prize Administrator will award a single dollar amount to the designated primary Competitor. In this case, the Competitor shall be an incubator, organization, and/or limited liability company (LLC). Prize awards will not be paid to individuals directly. The primary Competitor is solely responsible for allocating any prize funds among its team members and/or allocating the funds for operational use. The primary Competitor entity is also responsible for all associated taxes.

A.4 Submission Rights

By making a submission and consenting to the rules of the contest, a competitor is granting to DOE, the Prize Administrator, and any other third parties supporting DOE in the contest, a license to display publicly and use the parts of the submission that are designated as “public” for government purpose. This license includes posting or linking to the public portions of the submission on the Prize Administrator’s or HeroX’s applications, on the contest website, DOE websites, and partner websites, and the inclusion of the submission in any other media, worldwide. The submission may be viewed by DOE, the Prize Administrator, and judges for purposes of the contests, including, but not limited to, screening and evaluation purposes. The Prize Administrator and any third parties acting on their behalf will also have the right to publicize the competitors’ names and, as applicable, the names of competitors’ team members and organizations, which participated in the submission on the contest website indefinitely.

By entering, Competitor represents and warrants that:

The competitor is the sole, original author and copyright owner of the submission or that the competitor has acquired sufficient rights to use and to authorize others, including DOE, to use the submission as specified throughout the rules; that the submission does not infringe upon any copyright, trade secret, trademark, nondisclosure agreement, patent, or upon any other third-party rights; and that the submission is free of malware.

A.5 Copyright

Each competitor represents and warrants that the competitor is the sole author and copyright owner of the submission; that the submission is an original work of the competitor, or that the competitor has acquired sufficient rights to use and to authorize others, including DOE, to use the submission, as specified throughout the rules; that the submission does not infringe upon any copyright or upon any other third-party rights of which the competitor is aware; and that the submission is free of malware.

A.6 Contest Subject to Applicable Law

All contests are subject to all applicable federal laws and regulations. Participation constitutes each participant’s full and unconditional agreement to these Official Contest Rules and administrative decisions, which are final and binding in all matters related to the contest. This notice is not an obligation of funds; the final awards are contingent upon the availability of appropriations.

A.7 Resolution of Disputes

DOE is solely responsible for administrative decisions, which are final and binding in all matters related to the contest.

In the event of a dispute, the authorized account holder of the email address used to register will be deemed to be the competitor. The “authorized account holder” is the natural person or legal entity assigned an email address by an Internet access provider, online service provider, or other organization responsible for assigning email addresses for the domain associated with the submitted address. Competitors and potential winners may be required to show proof of being the authorized account holder.

The Prize Administrator nor DOE will not arbitrate, intervene, advise on, or resolve any matters between team members or any disputes between teams.

A.8 Publicity

The winners of these prizes (collectively, “Winners”) will be featured on DOE and NREL websites.

Except where prohibited, participation in the contest constitutes each winner's consent to DOE's and its agents' use of each winner's name, likeness, photograph, voice, opinions, and/or hometown and state information for promotional purposes through any form of media, worldwide, without further permission, payment, or consideration.

A.9 Liability

Upon registration, all participants agree to assume and, thereby, have assumed any and all risks of injury or loss in connection with or in any way arising from participation in this contest or development of any submission. Upon registration, except in the case of willful misconduct, all participants agree to and, thereby, do waive and release any and all claims or causes of action against the federal government and its officers, employees, and agents for any and all injury and damage of any nature whatsoever (whether existing or thereafter arising, whether direct, indirect, or consequential; and whether foreseeable or not), arising from their participation in the contest, whether the claim or cause of action arises under contract or tort.

In accordance with the delegation of authority to run this contest delegated to the Director of OTT, the Director has determined that no liability insurance will be required of competitors to compete in this competition, per 15 USC 3719(i)(2).

A.10 Records Retention and Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

All materials submitted to DOE as part of a submission become DOE records. Any confidential commercial information contained in a submission should be designated at the time of submission.

Competitors are encouraged to employ protective markings in the following manner:

- The cover sheet of the submission must be marked as follows and identify the specific pages containing trade secrets or commercial or financial information that is privileged or confidential:

Notice of Restriction on Disclosure and Use of Data:

Pages [list applicable pages] of this document may contain trade secrets or commercial or financial information that is privileged or confidential and is exempt from public disclosure. Such information shall be used or disclosed only for evaluation purposes. The Government may use or disclose any information that is not appropriately marked or otherwise restricted, regardless of source. [End of Notice]

- The header and footer of every page that contains trade secrets or privileged commercial or financial information must be marked as follows: "May contain trade secrets or commercial or financial information that is privileged or confidential and exempt from public disclosure."
- In addition, each line or paragraph containing trade secrets or commercial or financial information that is privileged or confidential must be enclosed in brackets.

Competitors will be notified of any FOIA requests for their submissions in accordance with 29 C.F.R.

§ 70.26. Competitors may then have the opportunity to review materials and work with a FOIA representative prior to the release of materials.

A.11 Privacy

If you choose to provide HeroX with personal information by registering or completing the submission package through the contest website, you understand that such information will be transmitted to DOE and may be kept in a system of records. Such information will be used only to respond to you in matters regarding your submission and/or the contest unless you choose to receive updates or notifications about other contests or programs from DOE on an opt-in basis. DOE and NREL are not collecting any information for commercial marketing.

A.12 General Conditions

DOE reserves the right to cancel, suspend, and/or modify the contest, or any part of it, at any time. If any fraud, technical failures, or any other factor beyond DOE's reasonable control impairs the integrity or proper functioning of the contests, as determined by DOE in its sole discretion, DOE may cancel the contest.

Although DOE indicates in the Phase 1 and Phase 2 contests that it will select up to several winners for each contest, DOE reserves the right to only select competitors that are likely to achieve the goals of the program. If, in DOE's determination, no competitors are likely to achieve the goals of the program, DOE will select no competitors to be winners and will award no prize money.

ALL DECISIONS BY DOE ARE FINAL AND BINDING IN ALL MATTERS RELATED TO THE CONTEST.

A.13 Program Policy Factors

While the scores of the expert reviewers will be carefully considered, it is the role of the Prize Administrator to maximize the impact of contest funds. Some factors outside the control of competitors and beyond the independent expert reviewer scope of review may need to be considered to accomplish this goal. The following is a list of such factors. In addition to the reviewers' scores, the below program policy factors may be considered in determining winners:

- The geographic diversity and potential economic impact of projects.
- The Program Requirement area diversity.
- The degree to which the submission will have positive economic, social, quality of life, and/or environmental impacts on communities or the region.
- The performance of the nominated startup in the Startup Pitch Competitions.
- Whether the use of additional DOE funds and provided resources are non-duplicative and compatible with the stated goals of this program and DOE's mission generally.
- The degree to which the submission exhibits technological or programmatic diversity when compared to the existing DOE project portfolio and other competitors.
- Whether the submission is likely to lead to increased employment, workforce development, and manufacturing in the United States, including in low to moderate income communities.
- The degree to which the submission exhibits team member diversity and the inclusion of underrepresented groups, with participants including but not limited to graduates and students of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and other minority-serving institutions (MSIs) or members operating within Qualified Opportunity Zones or other

underserved communities.

- The level of industry involvement and demonstrated ability to accelerate commercialization and overcome key market barriers.
- Whether the competitor provides a higher than standard cost share.
- The degree to which the submission is likely to lead to increased employment and manufacturing in the United States or provide other economic benefit to U.S. taxpayers.
- The degree to which the submission will accelerate transformational technological, financial, or workforce advances in areas that industry by itself is not likely to undertake because of technical or financial uncertainty.
- The degree to which the submission supports complementary DOE funded efforts or projects, which, when taken together, will best achieve the goals and objectives of DOE.
- The degree to which the submission expands DOE's funding to new competitors and recipients who have not been supported by DOE in the past.
- The degree to which the submission enables new and expanding market segments.
- Whether the project promotes increased coordination with nongovernmental entities for the demonstration of technologies and research applications to facilitate technology transfer.
- Whether submission content sufficiently confirms the competitor's intent to commercialize early-stage technology and establish a viable U.S.-based business in the near future.

Appendix B: Impact Tracking Metrics

Reported at point of cohort selection:

1. # applicants to program (total)
2. # applicants to program applying with a DOE-funded technology (e.g., licensed from a national lab or developed with help from a DOE grant)
3. # of accepted cohort members working on a DOE-funded technology
4. Breakdown of applicants by identity categories:
 - # of executive leadership team members per racial category in Note A (see next page in this document for notes).
 - # of executive leadership team members per identity category in Note B.
5. Breakdown of accepted cohort members by identity categories:
 - # of executive leadership team members per racial category in Note A.
 - # of executive leadership team members per identity category in Note B.
6. # companies served and types of technologies, including names and locations

Reported at beginning of performance period (baseline) and on an annual timescale:

7. # jobs created by companies (have companies report total number of employees at time of survey)
 - # full time
 - # part time
8. # new national lab partnerships (e.g., CRADAs, license agreements)
9. # grants awarded (total, summed across all companies)
10. # companies that received investment / follow-on funding
11. \$ raised by companies as investment / follow-on funding

12. \$ of company revenue
 - Total, summed across all companies
 - Average across all companies
13. # prototypes launched
14. # demonstration projects launched
15. Location of technology prototypes launched
16. Location of demonstration projects launched
17. Location of companies that received investment / follow-on funding

B.1 Notes

“Applicant” and “cohort member” refers to the team as a whole. “Team members” refer to individuals on the team.

A. Racial categories:

- Indigenous / Native American / Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black / African American
- Hispanic / Latino
- Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander
- Two or more races
- White

B. Other identity categories (self-identified):

- Female / male / non-binary
- LGBTQ+
- Veteran / active military / reserve
- Person with disability
- Rural
- Has been adversely affected by low socioeconomic status

Appendix C: Cost Share

This section summarizes cost share information for the cooperative agreement.

C.1 Legal Responsibility

Although the cost share requirement applies to the project as a whole, including work performed by members of the project team other than the prime recipient, the prime recipient is legally responsible for paying the entire cost share. If the funding agreement is terminated prior to the end of the project period, the prime recipient is required to contribute at least the cost share percentage of total expenditures incurred through the date of termination.

The prime recipient is solely responsible for managing cost share contributions by the project team and enforcing cost share obligation assumed by project team members in subawards or related agreements.

C.2 Cost Share Allocation

Each project team is free to determine how best to allocate the cost share requirement among its team members. The amount contributed by individual project team members may vary, as long as the cost share requirement for the project as a whole is met.

C.3 Cost Share Types and Allowability

Every cost share contribution must be allowable under the applicable federal cost principles, as described in [Appendix D: Cooperative Agreement Funding Restrictions](#). In addition, cost share must be verifiable upon submission of the Full Application.

Project teams may provide cost share in the form of cash or in-kind contributions. Cost share may be provided by the prime recipient, subrecipients, or third parties (entities that do not have a role in performing the scope of work). Vendors/contractors may not provide cost share. Any partial donation of goods or services is considered a discount and is not allowable.

Cash contributions include, but are not limited to: personnel costs, fringe costs, supply and equipment costs, indirect costs, and other direct costs.

In-kind contributions are those where a value of the contribution can be readily determined, verified and justified but where no actual cash is transacted in securing the good or service comprising the contribution. Allowable in-kind contributions include, but are not limited to: the donation of volunteer time or the donation of space or use of equipment.

Project teams may use funding or property received from state or local governments or regional entities to meet the cost share requirement, so long as the funding was not provided to the state or local government by the federal government.

The prime recipient may not use the following sources to meet its cost share obligations including, but not limited to:

- Revenues or royalties from the prospective operation of an activity beyond the project period;
- Proceeds from the prospective sale of an asset of an activity;
- Federal funding or property (e.g., federal grants, equipment owned by the federal government); or
- Expenditures that were reimbursed under a separate federal program.

Project teams may not use the same cash or in-kind contributions to meet cost share requirements for more than one project or program.

Cost share contributions must be specified in the project budget, verifiable from the prime recipient's records, and necessary and reasonable for proper and efficient accomplishment of the project. As all sources of cost share are considered part of total project cost, the cost share dollars will be scrutinized under the same federal regulations as federal dollars to the project. Every cost share contribution must be reviewed and approved in advance by the Contracting Officer and incorporated into the project budget before the expenditures are incurred.

Selectees are encouraged to refer to 2 CFR 200.306 as amended by 2 CFR 910.130 for additional cost sharing requirements.

C.4 Cost Share Contributions by FFRDCs and GOGOs

Because Federally Funded Research and Development Centers (FFRDCs) and Government-Owned, Government-Operated laboratories (GOGOs) are funded by the federal government, costs incurred by

FFRDCs and GOGOs generally may not be used to meet the cost share requirement. FFRDCs and GOGOs may contribute cost share only if the contributions are paid directly from the contractor's Management Fee or another non-federal source.

C.5 Cost Share Verification

Selectees are required to provide written assurance of their proposed cost share contributions in their Full Applications.

Upon selection for award negotiations, selectees are required to provide additional information and documentation regarding their cost share contributions.

C.6 Cost Share Payment

OTT requires prime recipients to contribute the cost share amount incrementally over the life of the award. Specifically, the prime recipient's cost share for each billing period must always reflect the overall cost share ratio negotiated by the parties (i.e., the total amount of cost sharing on each invoice when considered cumulatively with previous invoices must reflect, at a minimum, the cost sharing percentage negotiated). As FFRDC and GOGO funding will be provided directly to the FFRDC(s) and GOGOs by DOE, prime recipients will be required to provide project cost share at a percentage commensurate with the FFRDC and GOGO costs, on a budget period basis, resulting in a higher interim invoicing cost share ratio than the total award ratio.

In limited circumstances, and where it is in the government's interest, the OTT Contracting Officer may approve a request by the prime recipient to meet its cost share requirements on a less frequent basis, such as monthly or quarterly. Regardless of the interval requested, the prime recipient must be up-to-date on cost share at each interval. Such requests must be sent to the Contracting Officer during award negotiations and include the following information: (1) a detailed justification for the request; (2) a proposed schedule of payments, including amounts and dates; (3) a written commitment to meet that schedule; and (4) such evidence as necessary to demonstrate that the prime recipient has complied with its cost share obligations to date. The Contracting Officer must approve all such requests before they go into effect.

Appendix D: Cooperative Agreement Funding Restrictions

This section summarizes funding restrictions and allowable costs associated with the cooperative agreement budget.

D.1 Allowable Costs

All expenditures must be allowable, allocable, and reasonable in accordance with the applicable federal cost principles. Refer to the following applicable Federal cost principles for more information:

- FAR Part 31 for For-Profit entities
- 2 CFR Part 200 Subpart E - Cost Principles for all other non-federal entities.

D.2 Pre-Award Costs

Selectees must request prior written approval if they wish to charge pre-award costs. Pre-award costs are those incurred prior to the effective date of the federal award directly pursuant to the negotiation and in

anticipation of the federal award where such costs are necessary for efficient and timely performance of the scope of work. Such costs are allowable only to the extent that they would have been allowable if incurred after the date of the federal award and only with the written approval of the federal awarding agency, through the Contracting Officer assigned to the award.

Pre-award costs cannot be incurred prior to the Selection Official signing the Selection Statement and Analysis. Pre-award costs can only be incurred if such costs would be reimbursable under the agreement if incurred after award.

Pre-award expenditures are made at the Selectee's risk; OTT is not obligated to reimburse costs:(1) in the absence of appropriations; (2) if an award is not made; or (3) if an award is made for a lesser amount than the Selectee anticipated.

D.3 Performance of Work in the United States

a. Requirement

All work performed under OTT Awards must be performed in the United States. This requirement does not apply to the purchase of supplies and equipment; however, the prime recipient should make every effort to purchase supplies and equipment within the United States. The prime recipient must flow down this requirement to its subrecipients.

b. Failure to Comply

If the prime recipient fails to comply with the Performance of Work in the United States requirement, OTT may deny reimbursement for the work conducted outside the United States and such costs may not be recognized as allowable recipient cost share. The prime recipient is responsible should any work under this Award be performed outside the United States, absent a waiver, regardless of if the work is performed by the prime recipient, subrecipients, contractors or other project partners.

D.4 Construction

Recipients are required to obtain written authorization from the Contracting Officer before incurring any major construction costs.

D.5 Foreign Travel

Foreign travel costs are not allowable under this FOA.

D.6 Equipment and Supplies

To the greatest extent practicable, all equipment and products purchased with funds made available under this funding program should be American-made. This requirement does not apply to used or leased equipment.

Property disposition will be required at the end of a project if the current fair market value of property exceeds \$5,000. The rules for property disposition are set forth in 2 CFR 200.310 – 200.316 as amended by 2 CFR 910.360.

D.7 Lobbying

Recipients and subrecipients may not use any federal funds to influence or attempt to influence, directly or indirectly, congressional action on any legislative or appropriation matters.

Recipients and subrecipients are required to complete and submit [SF-LLL, “Disclosure of Lobbying Activities”](#) if any non-federal funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence any of the following in connection with your application:

- An officer or employee of any federal agency
- A Member of Congress
- An officer or employee of Congress
- An employee of a Member of Congress.

D.8 Risk Assessment

Prior to making a federal award, DOE is required by 31 U.S.C. 3321 and 41 U.S.C. 2313 to review information available through any Office of Management and Budget (OMB)-designated repositories of government-wide eligibility qualification or financial integrity information, such as SAM Exclusions and “Do Not Pay.”

In addition, DOE evaluates the risk(s) posed by selectee before they receive federal awards. This evaluation may consider results of the evaluation of the selectee’s eligibility; the quality of the application; financial stability; quality of management systems and ability to meet the management standards prescribed in this part; history of performance; reports and findings from audits; and the selectee's ability to effectively implement statutory, regulatory, or other requirements imposed on non-federal entities.

In addition to this review, DOE must comply with the guidelines on government-wide suspension and debarment in 2 CFR 180, and must require non-federal entities to comply with these provisions. These provisions restrict federal awards, sub-awards and contracts with certain parties that are debarred, suspended, or otherwise excluded from or ineligible for participation in federal programs or activities.

D.9 Invoice Review and Approval

DOE employs a risk-based approach to determine the level of supporting documentation required for approving invoice payments. Recipients may be required to provide some or all of the following items with their requests for reimbursement:

- Summary of costs by cost categories
- Timesheets or personnel hours report
- Invoices/receipts for all travel, equipment, supplies, contractual, and other costs
- UCC filing proof for equipment acquired with project funds by for profit recipients and subrecipients
- Explanation of cost share for invoicing period
- Analogous information for some subrecipients
- Other items as required by DOE.

Appendix E: Bonus Prizes

EPIC is intended to serve as a scalable and replicable framework for efficiently deploying support to incubators serving energy entrepreneurs and startups. At any time, DOE Technical Program Offices may leverage this framework by sponsoring one or more Bonus Prizes.

The Bonus Prizes can be any of the following:

- Incubator Funding Program Bonus Prize:

A DOE Technical Program Office may elect to provide a Bonus Prize to one or more incubators competing in the Incubator Funding Program for focusing on a priority technical area of their choice. Bonus Prize winners are awarded from the pool of Phase 1 competitors. Bonus Prize winners are considered finalists and become eligible to move on to Phase 2.

- **Startup Pitch Competition Bonus Prize:**

A DOE Technical Program Office may elect to provide a Bonus Prize to one or more startups competing in the Startup Pitch Competitions for focusing on a priority technical area of their choice.

- **OTT Outstanding Submission Award:**

OTT and/or a partner office may support additional cooperative agreements to be awarded to Phase 2 winners. The OTT Outstanding Submission Award is subject to FY24 appropriations.

Bonus Prizes may be added at any point. Any updates will be posted on the [HeroX](#) prize page.