



2025 RENEW AMERICA'S SCHOOLS OFFICIAL PRIZE RULES

December 2024

Submission Due: Thursday, April 3, 2025, at 5 p.m. ET

Preface

The U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE's) Renew America's Schools Prize will be governed by 15 U.S.C. §3719 and this Official Prize Rules document. The prize administrator reserves the right to modify this Official Prize Rules document if necessary and will publicly post any such notifications as well as notify registered prize participants.

What Is This Document?

This Official Prize Rules document provides competitors with information to construct a compliant submission package for the 2025 Renew America's Schools Prize (also advertised on EERE Exchange as DE-NOFO-0003525). DOE's Renew America's Schools Program funds eligible energy efficiency and renewable energy projects at public K-12 schools, prioritizing schools serving high-need communities. The 2025 Renew America's Schools Prize will fund portfolios of schools and school facilities that show a need for energy improvements, including energy efficiency cost-saving measures, and financing for renewable energy projects.

This document describes a funding program that utilizes both prize authority¹ and financial assistance.²

This document contains the Official Prize Rules and guidance for how to compete in Phase 1 and subsequently enter into a cooperative agreement with DOE, which includes Phase 2 and Phase 3.

Reading this document in full should answer most questions potential competitors may have. Failure to follow these instructions will result in a noncompliant submission package. Additional questions should be sent to Schools@doe.gov. Please refer to the [FAQ](#) page on HeroX to find the answer to your emailed question. Questions must be submitted no later than three business days prior to the application due date and time. Feedback on individual concepts and eligibility will not be provided through the FAQ tab.

To apply, competitors must register and complete their submission package on the prize's [HeroX](#) page before April 3, 2025, at 5 p.m. ET. Required forms and suggested templates are available under the [Resources](#) tab. For technical issues with the HeroX platform, contact: RenewSchoolsPrize@nrel.gov.

Teaming Partner List

DOE is continuing to gather information for the "Teaming Partner List" to help competitors form project teams for this prize. The list allows organizations to express their interest in participation to other competitors, explore potential partnerships, and form project teams. Updates to the Teaming Partner List will be available on the HeroX [Resources](#) page. It will be regularly updated to reflect new teaming partners who provide their organization's information.

Submission Instructions: To be included on the Teaming Partner List, organizations should fill out this [form](#) or email their information to Schools@doe.gov with the subject line, "Teaming Partner Information."

Disclaimer: By submitting a request to be included on the Teaming Partner List, the requesting organization consents to publication of the above-referenced information. By facilitating the Teaming Partner List, DOE is not endorsing, sponsoring, or otherwise evaluating qualifications of individuals and organizations self-identifying themselves for placement on the Teaming Partner List. DOE will not pay for the provision of any information, nor will it compensate any competitors or requesting organizations for the development of such information.

¹ 15 U.S.C. §3719

² 2 CFR 200 and 2 CFR 910 and 42 U.S.C. § 18831

Contents

- Preface 2
- 0. Introduction and Program Summary..... 4**
 - 0.1. Background and Context..... 6
 - 0.2. Program Purpose..... 7
 - 0.3. Renew America’s Schools Prize: Phase 1 8
 - 0.4. What To Submit for Cooperative Agreement Negotiations 8
 - 0.5. Eligible Entities 11
 - 0.6. Eligible Types of Improvements (for Phase 3) 13
 - 0.7. Important Dates 13
- 1. Prize (Phase 1) 14**
 - 1.1. Introduction 14
 - 1.2. Prizes To Win 14
 - 1.3. How To Enter 14
 - 1.4. Phase 1 Contest Process 14
 - 1.5. Phase 1 Important Dates..... 14
 - 1.6. Submission Package 15
 - 1.7. How Winners Are Determined..... 19
 - 1.8. Additional Terms and Conditions 21
 - 1.9. Ineligible Submissions 21
- 2. Cooperative Agreement (Phase 2 and 3)..... 22**
 - 2.1. Introduction 22
 - 2.2. Cooperative Agreement Process..... 22
 - 2.3. Award Overview 22
 - 2.4. What to Submit for Phase 2 Continuation Application..... 23
- Appendix A: Prize Terms and Conditions 25**
 - A.1 Universal Contest 25
 - A.2 Verification for Payments 25
 - A.3 Teams and Single-Entity Awards 26
 - A.4 Submission Rights..... 26
 - A.5 Copyright 26
 - A.6 Contest Subject to Applicable Law 26
 - A.7 Resolution of Disputes 27
 - A.8 Publicity..... 27
 - A.9 Liability 27
 - A.10 Records Retention and Freedom of Information Act..... 27
 - A.11 Privacy..... 28
 - A.12 General Conditions..... 28
 - A.13 Program Policy Factors..... 29

0. Introduction and Program Summary

The Renew America's Schools program competitively selects and funds eligible energy efficiency and renewable energy projects at public K-12 schools. This \$500 million program is a first-of-its-kind investment made possible by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). The program helps implement infrastructure improvements in schools, with a focus on local educational agencies (LEAs) that qualify as rural and/or high poverty. The program will help create healthier learning environments, lower utility costs, and redirect funds to support students and teachers.

Proposals considered under the 2025 Renew America's Schools Prize will support a portfolio of schools that identify the need for energy improvements, including energy efficiency improvements and/or renewable energy upgrades. Funded improvements will result in improved health and energy efficiency, and/or energy cost savings.

The 2025 Renew America's Schools Prize includes the **prize competition** (Phase 1) and a subsequent **cooperative agreement** (Phase 2 and Phase 3). Competitors submitting proposals should be organizations with the capacity to aggregate and manage portfolios of school facilities to receive energy assessments and improvements. Competitors should consider leveraging the [Teaming Partner List](#), found on HeroX, to add capacity and expertise to their teams.

This Official Prize Rules document outlines the components of the Renew America's Schools Prize (Phase 1) and the subsequent cooperative agreement process and funding (Phase 2 and Phase 3).

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) reserves the right to terminate award negotiations at any time for any reason. DOE reserves the right, without qualification, to reject any or all applications received in response to this prize-to-cooperative agreement award program and to select any application, in whole or in part, as a basis for negotiation and/or award.

Phase 1

Portfolio and Team = Up to 14 Winners at \$300,000 Cash Prize Each

In Phase 1, competitors will identify a minimum of 10 schools/school facilities to be included in their application. The portfolio may span multiple LEAs and should exhibit a high need for energy assessments and, ultimately, energy improvements. The goal of Phase 1 is for competitors to successfully assemble their project team and portfolio of school facilities; demonstrate the need for energy improvements at schools and school facilities in the defined portfolio; and outline their process to complete the tasks in Phase 2. Based on successful completion of Phase 1, winners will be invited to enter into negotiations with DOE for a cooperative agreement. Negotiations for this agreement will require additional steps as outlined in the next section.

Phase 2 and Phase 3

Phase 2 Cooperative Agreement: Strategic Plan and Energy Audits = \$500,000 to \$1,000,000 per Recipient

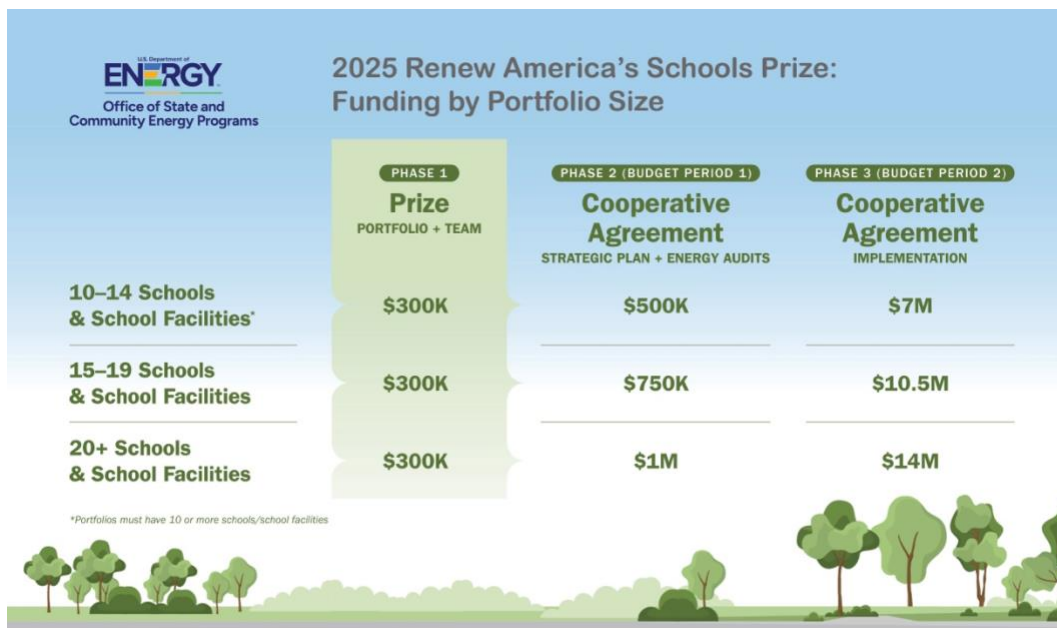
ONLY winners from Phase 1 will be eligible to negotiate with DOE to receive a cooperative agreement for Phase 2 and Phase 3 funding. The Selection Official reserves the right to down-select the number of Phase 1 winners that will enter into negotiations with DOE.

Phase 2 will be synonymous with Budget Period³ 1 of the cooperative agreement. Funding in Phase 2 will reimburse recipients for costs associated with energy audits and strategic planning and design. DOE will⁴ allocate a set amount of funding per recipient, which is determined by the number of schools or school facilities submitted in their Phase 1 application [see Table 1]. In Phase 2, recipients conduct The American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) Level 2 energy audits of all the schools/school facilities in the portfolio and develop a comprehensive strategic plan for implementing energy improvements. Energy audits and the strategic plan should provide schools with clear pathways to prioritize energy improvements, access private sector funding and/or tax credits, and realize high-impact health and safety benefits.

Phase 3 (Cooperative Agreement): Implementation = \$7,000,000 to \$14,000,000 per Recipient

Phase 3 will be synonymous with Budget Period³ 2 of the cooperative agreement. In this phase, DOE will allocate a set amount of funding per recipient, which is determined by the number of schools/school facilities submitted in their Phase 1 application (see Table 1). In Phase 3, recipients oversee implementation of the energy improvements identified at the end of Phase 2. DOE will work with recipients to ensure high-priority energy improvements are implemented within the allotted budget for Phase 3. Phase 3 should directly advance the measurable goals of energy savings and high-impact health and safety benefits outlined in Phase 1.

Table 1. Winners Will Receive Funding Based on Their Portfolio Size

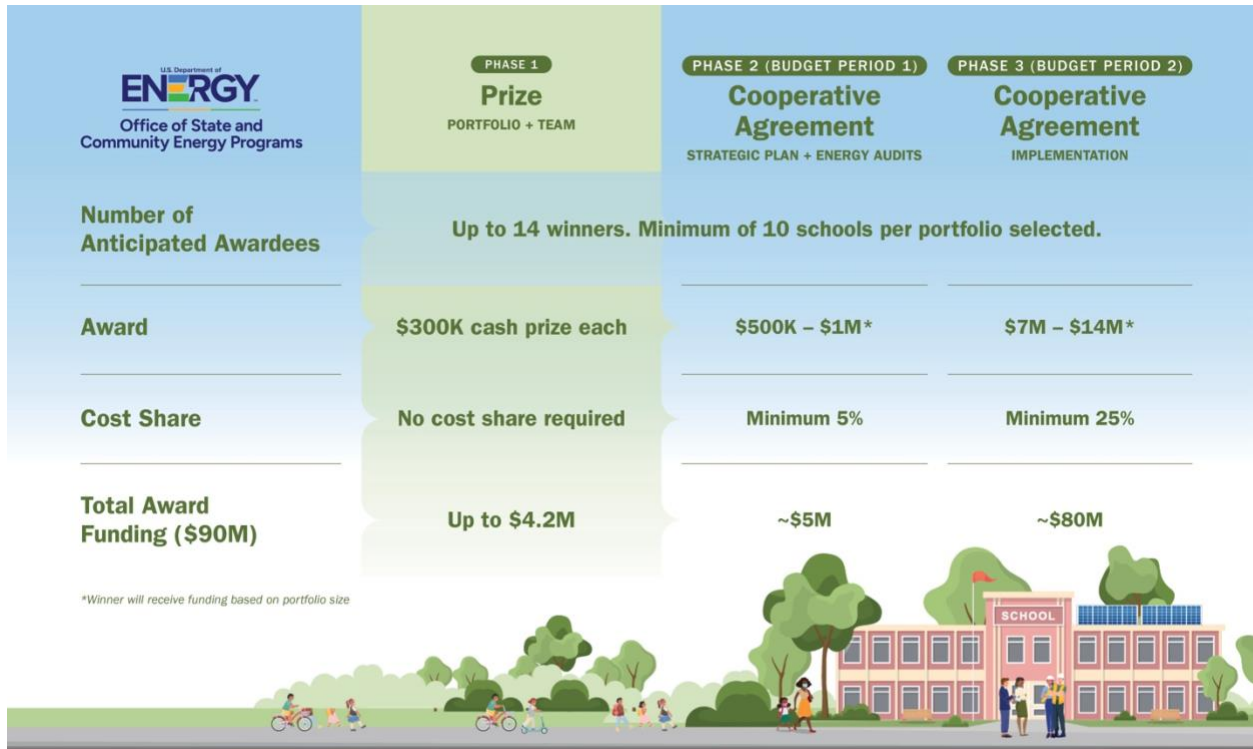


Note: Dollar amounts listed in Table 1 are federal funding only and do not include total project costs, which include federal and required cost share amounts.

³ 2 CFR 200.1 – Budget Period means the time interval from the start of date of a funded portion of an award to the end date of that funded portion, during which recipients and subrecipients are authorized to incur financial obligations of the funds awarded, including any funds carried forward or other revisions pursuant to 2 CFR 200.308. DOE anticipates Phase 2 (Budget Period 1) to be approximately 9–12 months and anticipates Phase 3 (Budget Period 2) to be approximately 12–48 months. See Section 2.3.3 Period of Performance for additional details.

⁴ DOE reserves the right to terminate award negotiations at any time for any reason. DOE reserves the right, without qualification, to reject any or all applications received in response to this prize-to-cooperative agreement and to select any application, in whole or in part, as a basis for negotiation and/or award.

Table 2. 2025 Renew America’s Schools Overview (Anticipate \$90 Million Across Three Phases)



*Federal funding provided in cooperative agreement depends on portfolio size. See Table 1.

DOE will allocate federal funding according to the number of schools/school facilities in the winning portfolio submitted in Phase 1 (see Table 1). DOE does not require funding to be used equally across schools/school facilities and reserves the right to terminate award negotiations at any time for any reason.

0.1. Background and Context

The Renew America’s School Program falls within DOE’s Office of State and Community Energy Programs (SCEP). The federal share for the prize and cooperative agreement will be funded, in whole or in part, with funds appropriated by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, more commonly known as the BIL.

The BIL is a once-in-a-generation investment in infrastructure that is designed to modernize and upgrade American infrastructure to enhance U.S. competitiveness, drive the creation of well-paying union jobs, tackle climate-related challenges, and ensure stronger access to economic, environmental, and other benefits for disadvantaged communities. The BIL appropriates more than \$62 billion to DOE to invest in American manufacturing and workers; expand access to energy efficiency and clean energy; deliver reliable, clean, and affordable power to more Americans; and demonstrate and deploy the technologies of tomorrow through clean energy demonstrations.

DOE’s BIL investments will support efforts to build a clean and equitable energy economy that achieves a zero-carbon electricity system by 2035, and to put the United States on a path to achieve net-zero emissions economywide by no later than 2050⁵ to benefit all Americans.

⁵ The White House. 2021. “Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad.” <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/27/executive-order-on-tackling-the-climate-crisis-at-home-and-abroad/>.

This program supports the implementation of [Section 40541 of the BIL](#), as codified at 42 U.S.C. § 18831, which provides \$500 million for grants for energy improvements at public school facilities for the 5-year period encompassing Fiscal Years 2022 through 2026. DOE aims to partner with public school stakeholders to facilitate substantial additional investment, prioritize schools with high needs, minimize administrative burden, and build enduring capacity in LEAs to maximize impact equitably and efficiently.

The activities to be funded under this program support BIL Section 40541 and the broader governmentwide approach to support projects that enable replicable and scalable impacts; create innovative, sustaining partnerships; leverage funding and economies of scale; focus on disadvantaged communities; improve student, teacher, and occupant health; enrich learning and growth; and assist schools that serve as community assets (e.g., neighborhood cooling centers or disaster recovery shelters); and are crafted thoughtfully within the context of school facilities (e.g., procurement restraints, construction windows, and so on). These projects should maximize the benefits of the clean energy transition as the nation works to support the environment, empower workers, and advance environmental justice.

0.2. Program Purpose

There are nearly 130,000 K-12 schools in the United States,⁶ including both public and private schools. Each year, public schools spend more than \$8 billion on energy costs, exceeding their combined annual budget for computers and textbooks.⁷

Many of these schools have aging infrastructure, which is why the American Society of Civil Engineers rated American schools a D+ on their 2021 report card.⁸ Aging schools often pose budgetary challenges for cash-strapped school districts and threaten the ability of students to learn in comfortable and healthy classrooms. If poorly maintained, critical building systems, like heating, ventilating, and air conditioning systems, can contribute to respiratory issues and even promote the spread of infectious diseases, including COVID-19. School districts in rural, high-poverty, and disadvantaged communities contain a disproportionate amount of aging, decaying school buildings. By prioritizing energy improvements in schools, LEAs can reduce their second-highest operational expense and leverage the savings to fund future facility maintenance and educational programs.

This program seeks applications that not only address the need for energy efficiency and renewable energy upgrades, but also create innovative and sustaining partnerships, leverage funding and economies of scale, and provide replicable and scalable models for sector wide change. The program supports funding projects that address historic inequities in school facilities investments, reduce school energy expenditures, help schools lead the nation in environmental sustainability, and create well-paying union jobs. Energy consumption at U.S. public K-12 schools is a significant source of domestic greenhouse gas emissions and the second-highest operational expense to schools, second only to salaries. Packages of energy improvements (e.g., combining heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning and lighting upgrades with solar water heating) can save even more energy than individual upgrades, and zero-energy or zero-energy-ready construction can reduce energy consumption by more than 65%. These

⁶ National Center for Education Statistics. n.d. "Educational institutions." <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=84>.

⁷ The White House. 2022. "FACT SHEET: The Biden-Harris Action Plan for Building Better School Infrastructure." <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/04/04/fact-sheet-the-biden-harris-action-plan-for-building-better-school-infrastructure/>.

⁸ U.S. Department of Energy. 2022. "The Biden-Harris Administration Announces \$500 Million Program for Better School Infrastructure." <https://www.energy.gov/articles/biden-harris-administration-announces-500-million-program-better-school-infrastructure>.

improvements can pay dividends for years to come: Every dollar saved on utility bills is a dollar better spent on educating children.

As part of the whole-of-government approach to advance equity and encourage worker organizing and collective bargaining, and in alignment with BIL Section 40541, this program and any related activities encourages meaningful engagement and participation of workforce organizations, including labor unions, as well as underrepresented⁹ and disadvantaged communities and underrepresented groups, including consultation with Tribal nations. Consistent with [Executive Order 14008](#), this program is designed to help meet the goal that 40% of the overall benefits of certain federal investments in clean energy and climate solutions flow to disadvantaged communities, including those identified by the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool, as well as all federally recognized Tribes or Tribal entities (whether or not they have land).

0.3. Renew America’s Schools Prize: Phase 1

The goal of Phase 1 (Portfolio and Team) is for competitors to successfully assemble their project team, assemble their portfolio of schools/school facilities, demonstrate the need for energy improvements at the defined portfolio, and outline their process to complete the tasks in Phase 2. In Phase 1, competitors will assemble project teams and portfolios, ensuring there are a minimum of 10 schools/school facilities included in their portfolio. Competitors will also provide timelines and processes for conducting energy audits/energy assessments of their portfolio to be completed in Phase 2 and pathways for financing improvements, stacking funds, and leveraging tax credits and/or private sector capital. Up to 14 winners will receive a \$300,000 cash prize.

0.4. What To Submit for Cooperative Agreement Negotiations

The cooperative agreement negotiation process will comprise several meetings between DOE and the selectee to negotiate the terms of the cooperative agreement. This includes the Statement of Project Objectives (SOPO), budget, and other contractual requirements.

If selected for award negotiations, DOE reserves the right to require that selectees provide additional or clarifying information regarding the application submissions, the project, project team, award requirements, and any other matters related to the anticipated award. The following is a no exhaustive list of examples of documentation that may be required:

- 0.4.1 SF-424 application for federal assistance
- 0.4.2 SOPO
- 0.4.3 SF-424a budget justification
- 0.4.4 Community benefits plan
- 0.4.5 Cybersecurity plan
- 0.4.6 Pre-award information sheet
- 0.4.7 Participants and collaborating organizations
- 0.4.8 Current and pending support
- 0.4.9 SF-LLL disclosure of lobbying activities
- 0.4.10 Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and System for Award Management (SAM) registration

⁹ “Underrepresented” refers to populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that are shown to have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life, as exemplified by communities that have been denied fair, just, and impartial treatment, which may include women, persons with disabilities, persons who live in rural areas, persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality, veterans, members of religious minorities, Black, Latino, Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, other persons of color, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons.

- 0.4.11 FedConnect registration
- 0.4.12 Letter(s) of commitment (blended cost share letter).

Organizations negotiating 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 unable to meet required deadlines.

0.4.1 SF-424 Application for Federal Assistance

Selectees must complete the SF-424 application for federal assistance, available at <https://grants.gov/forms>. 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 SF-424 are for the complete project period and not just the first project year, first phase, or other subset of the project period.

0.4.2 Statement of Project Objectives

Selectees must complete a SOPO that includes tasks, subtasks, milestones, deliverables, and more. DOE will provide a SOPO template to selectees at the time of negotiations.

0.4.3 SF-424a Budget Justification

Selectees must complete each tab of the budget workbook for the project, 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 within the budget justification workbook.

0.4.4 Community Benefits Plan

To support the goal of building a clean and equitable energy economy, the BIL-funded projects are expected to (1) support meaningful community and labor engagement; (2) invest in America’s workforce; (3) advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA); and (4) contribute to the goal that 40% of the overall project benefits of certain federal investments flow to disadvantaged communities (the Justice40 Initiative).¹⁰ To ensure these goals are met, selectees must update their community benefits plan (submitted for Phase 1) to reflect how their project incorporates the four objectives stated earlier.

0.4.5 Cybersecurity Plan

In accordance with BIL Section 40126, competitors selected for award negotiations must submit a cybersecurity plan to DOE prior to receiving funding.¹¹ These plans are intended to foster a cybersecurity-by-design approach for BIL efforts. DOE will use these plans to ensure effective integration and coordination across its research, development, and demonstration programs. A cybersecurity plan is **not** required as part of the application submission for this prize, but all projects will be required to submit a cybersecurity plan during the award negotiation phase.

¹⁰ The Justice40 initiative, established by E.O. 14008, sets a goal that 40% of the overall benefits of certain federal investments flow to disadvantaged communities. Consistent with E.O. 14008 and Justice40 interim implementation guidance, M-21-28 and M-23-09, DOE recognizes geographically defined disadvantaged communities as identified by the White House Council on Environmental Quality’s Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool, and that all federally recognized Tribes and Tribal entities are disadvantaged communities, whether or not they have land.

¹¹ 42 U.S.C. § 18725

DOE recommends using open guidance and standards, such as the National Institute of Standards and Technology's Cybersecurity Framework and the DOE Cybersecurity Capability Maturity Model.¹² The cybersecurity plan created pursuant to BIL Section 40126 should document any deviation from open standards, as well as the use of proprietary standards wherein the awardee determines that such deviation is necessary.

0.4.6 Pre-Award Information Sheet

Selectees must complete the pre-Award information sheet and all required attachments, including but not limited to: participants and collaborating organizations, current and pending support, and any other required disclosures, waivers, attachments or supporting documentation. The pre-award information sheet can be found at [EERE Funding Application and Management Forms | Department of Energy](#).

0.4.7 Participants and Collaborating Organizations

If chosen for award negotiations, the selectee must submit a list of personnel who are proposed to work on the project, both at the recipient and subrecipient level, and a list of proposed collaborating organizations prior to award. Recipients will have an ongoing responsibility to notify DOE of changes to personnel and collaborating organizations, and submit updated information during the life of the award. Note: the list of personnel only includes individuals working more than 160 hours per year on the project.

0.4.8 Current and Pending Support

If chosen for award negotiations, the selectee must submit current and pending support disclosures and resumes for any principal investigators or senior/key personnel. Throughout the life of the award, the recipient has an ongoing responsibility to submit current and pending support disclosure statements and resumes for any new principal investigator and senior/key personnel.

0.4.9 SF-LLL Disclosure of Lobbying Activities

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," to ensure that nonfederal 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.

0.4.10 Unique Entity Identifier and System for Award Management

There are several required one-time actions that selectees must complete during negotiations before an award can be made. Some of these actions may take several weeks, so it is vital selectees build in enough time to complete them. Failure to complete these actions could interfere with negotiation deadlines or the ability to receive an award if selected. If your project is already registered make sure your registration is active and up to date. All registrations are free.

¹² North American Electric Reliability Council critical infrastructure protection standards for entities responsible for the availability and reliability of the bulk electric system. National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) IR 7628: 2 Smart grid cyber security strategy and requirements. NIST SP800-53, Recommended Security Controls for Federal Information Systems and Organizations: Catalog of security controls in 18 categories, along with profiles for low-, moderate-, and high-impact systems. NIST SP800-82, Guide to Industrial Control Systems (ICS) Security. NIST SP800-39, Integrated Enterprise-Wide Risk Management: Organization, mission, and information system view. AMI System Security Requirements: Security requirements for advanced metering infrastructure. International Organization for Standardization 27001, Information Security Management Systems: Guidance on establishing governance and control over security activities (this document must be purchased). Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers 1686-2007, Standard for Substation Intelligent Electronic Devices Cyber Security Capabilities (this document must be purchased). DOE Cybersecurity Capability Maturity Model.

You must have an active account with [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov), the System for Award Management, which includes having a UEI. Specifically:

- **What is it?** SAM is a federal procurement database. All entities that want to do business with the federal government MUST be registered in SAM.
- Existing SAM registrations must be updated annually.
- **Duration** to complete: several weeks.
- **Registration link:** <https://sam.gov/content/home>.

Unique Entity Identifier

- **What is it?** A UEI is a nonproprietary identifier that has replaced the federal government's use of a Data Universal Numbering System number effective April 4, 2022.
- Selectees must obtain a UEI from SAM to uniquely identify the entity. The UEI is available in the SAM entity registration record.
 - **Note:** Subawardees/subrecipients at all tiers must also obtain a UEI from SAM and provide it to the recipient before the subaward can be issued.
- **Duration** to complete: several weeks.
- **Registration link:** <https://sam.gov/content/entity-registration>

0.4.11 FedConnect

Each selectee must register in FedConnect at <https://www.fedconnect.net>.

0.4.12 Letter(s) of Commitment (Blended Cost Share Letter)

Cooperative agreements resulting from this funding opportunity will have blended cost share. A minimum 5% cost share is required for Phase 2: Budget Period 1 (Strategic Plan and Energy Audits), and a minimum 25% cost share is required for Phase 3: Budget Period 2 (Implementation). See the cooperative agreement requirements document for additional details on cost share requirements.

0.5. Eligible Entities

Entities eligible for participation in the 2025 Renew America's Schools Prize must meet the eligibility requirements as described in [Section 40541\(a\)\(3\) of the BIL](#). If the application does not meet these requirements, it will be considered ineligible and removed from further evaluation. Specifically, an eligible entity is described as a consortium of:

One LEA¹³ and one or more:

- Schools
- Nonprofit organizations that have the knowledge and capacity to partner and assist with energy improvements
- For-profit organizations that have the knowledge and capacity to partner and assist with energy improvements or
- Community partners that have the knowledge and capacity to partner and assist with energy improvements.

¹³ The term "local educational agency" is defined according to Section 8101 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. See 20 U.S.C. § 7801(30). The term generally means a public board of education or other public authority legally constituted within a [state](#) for either administrative control or direction of, or to perform a service function for, public [elementary schools](#) or [secondary schools](#) in a city, [county](#), township, school district, or other political subdivision of a [state](#), or of or for a combination of school districts or counties that is recognized in a [state](#) as an administrative agency for its public [elementary schools](#) or [secondary schools](#). The term "local educational agency" includes an elementary school or secondary school funded by the Bureau of Indian Education, under certain circumstances.

The competition is open only to private entities (for-profits and nonprofits); non-federal government entities such as states, counties, tribes, and municipalities; 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.
- Academic institutions must be based in the United States.
- DOE employees, employees of sponsoring organizations, members of their immediate 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 prize.
- Individuals who worked at DOE (federal employees or support service contractors) within 6 months prior to the submission deadline of any contest are not eligible to participate in any prize contests in this program. Federal entities and federal employees are not eligible to participate in any portion of the prize.
- DOE national laboratory employees cannot compete in the prize.
- 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.
- Individuals participating in a foreign government talent recruitment program¹⁴ sponsored by a country of risk¹⁵ and teams that include such individuals are not eligible to compete.
- Entities owned by, controlled by, or subject to the jurisdiction or direction of a government of a country of risk are not eligible to compete.
- To be eligible, an individual authorized to represent the competitor must agree to and sign the following statement upon registration with the HeroX platform:

I am providing this submission package as part of my participation in this prize. 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 prize competition and complies with all other rules contained in the Official Prize 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.

Nonprofit organizations described in Section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 that engaged in lobbying activities after December 31, 1995, are **not** eligible to apply.

Note: Only Phase 1 prize winners are eligible to enter into negotiations with DOE for a cooperative agreement (encompassing Phase 2 and Phase 3 awards).

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ DOE has designated the following countries as foreign countries of risk: Iran, North Korea, Russia, and China. This list is subject to change.

0.6. Eligible Types of Improvements (for Phase 3)

Energy improvements in Phase 3 (Implementation) may take the form of repairs, renovations, or installations to the facility envelope, air-conditioning system, ventilation system, heating system, domestic hot water heating system, compressed air system, distribution system, lighting system, power system, and/or controls of a building. Projects may also include renewable energy improvements such as rooftop solar, micro wind turbines, and an alternative fueled vehicle infrastructure, as well as a purchase or lease of alternative fueled vehicles. Any improvement to a school or school facility that achieves energy savings and leads to improved teacher and student health, including indoor air quality, is also allowable. Costs related to electrifying end uses to take advantage of clean energy from the electric grid are also eligible. Packaging multiple improvements for deeper energy savings and carbon reductions is encouraged.

0.7. Important Dates

Refer to the following timeline on the [HeroX](#) platform for relevant dates and deadlines:

- **Phase 1 submission deadline:** April 3, 2025, at 5 p.m. ET
- **Informational webinar:** Tuesday, January 7, 2025, at 3 p.m. ET (see HeroX for the Zoom link)
- **Office hours #1:** Wednesday, February 12, 2025, at 3 p.m. ET (see HeroX for the Zoom link)
- **Office hours #2:** Wednesday, March 12, 2025, at 3 p.m. ET (see HeroX for the Zoom link)
- **Phase 1 prize winner announcement:** June 2025 (anticipated)
- **Expected timeframe for cooperative agreement negotiations:** starting in Summer 2025 (anticipated).

1. Prize (Phase 1)

1.1. Introduction

The goal of Phase 1 (Portfolio and Team) is for competitors to successfully assemble their project team of eligible entities, assemble their portfolio of schools/school facilities, demonstrate the need for energy improvements at the defined portfolio, and outline their process to complete the tasks in Phase 2. In Phase 1, competitors will assemble project teams and portfolios, ensuring there are a minimum of 10 schools/school facilities included in their portfolio. Competitors will also provide timelines and processes for conducting energy audits/energy assessments of their portfolio to be completed in Phase 2 and pathways for financing improvements, stacking funds, and leveraging tax credits and/or private sector capital.

1.2. Prizes To Win

Up to 14 Phase 1 winners will receive cash prizes of \$300,000 each and become eligible to move into negotiations for a cooperative agreement with DOE for Phase 2 and Phase 3.

1.3. How To Enter

Complete a submission package online at <https://www.herox.com/2025renewschoolsprize> before April 3, 2025, at 5 p.m. ET. To learn more about the process of setting up a HeroX account and applying to a prize, please reference the *HeroX Instructional Guide* under the Resources tab in the HeroX platform.

1.4. Phase 1 Contest Process

1. Preparation, Activation, and Submission. Competitors complete their submission packages, following the instructions in this document and submit online before Phase 1 of the contest closes.

Competitors may use the teaming list, located on the HeroX platform, to express their interest to other competitors, explore potential partnerships, and form project teams.

2. Assessment. The prize administrator screens all completed submissions and assigns a panel of DOE-approved subject matter expert reviewers to independently score the content of each submission. DOE's SCEP considers input from expert reviewers and makes the final decision on all winners. Scoring protocol and technical review criteria are outlined in Section 1.7.

3. Announcement. Approximately 60–90 days after Phase 1 closes, the prize administrator notifies winners and requests the necessary information (Internal Revenue Service W-9 form, Automated Clearing House [ACH] form, and prize acceptance form) to distribute cash prizes. The prize administrator will then publicly announce the winners.

1.5. Phase 1 Important Dates

- **Phase 1 opens:** December 17, 2024
- **Phase 1 submission deadline:** April 3, 2025
- **Evaluation period:** April–June 2025
- **Winner notification:** June 2025 (anticipated).

1.6. Submission Package

The following items comprise the prize submission package and must be submitted through the [HeroX](#) platform prior to the prize deadline. The submission documents are summarized in Table 3. Additional details in this section explain how to successfully collect and present the information for each required document. All templates and resources for this prize can be found on the HeroX platform under the Resources tab.

Table 3. Submission Items for Phase 1

Section	Page/Size Limit	Available to the Public?	Required?	Template Provided?
0. Team Name	Not applicable (N/A)	Yes	Yes	N/A
1. Technical Narrative	10 pages maximum including cover page; text should be at least 11-point font	No	Yes	Yes
2. Energy Justice Mapping Tool Reports	No page limit	No	Yes	Yes; use if unable to generate report
3. School Energy Assessment Form Tool Reports	No page limit	No	Yes	Yes
4. Community Benefits Plan	Five pages maximum including cover page; text should be at least 11-point font	No	Yes	Yes
5. Resumes	One page maximum per individual, combined into a single document	No	Yes	No
6. Letters of Commitment	One page maximum per letter, combined into a single document	No	Yes	No
7. Summary Slide	One slide maximum, designed for conference room projection; text should be at least 14-point font	Yes	Yes	Yes

The Renew America's Schools Prize platform and resources can be accessed here:

<https://www.herox.com/2025renewschoolsprize>.

Following is a detailed description of each required application component.

1. Technical Narrative (Template¹⁶ Provided)

(10 pages maximum, including cover page, submitted as a PDF)

¹⁶ To assist teams, DOE is providing an elective template to illustrate the types of information needed to evaluate whether teams meet minimum requirements in the associated critical success factors. Teams are not required to use this template and may submit using any form or format of their choosing. All submissions should address the substantive measures outlined in the template and described in this Official Prize Rules document.

The technical narrative should address the first four of five evaluation criteria (see Section 1.7 for all evaluation criteria):

- Need for planning and energy assessment: facility and community need, including:
 - Free and reduced-price lunch percentage per school/school facility
 - Free and reduced-price lunch percentage should be calculated based on the number of students who are eligible to participate in the free lunch and reduced-price lunch programs under the National School Lunch Act of 1946 divided by the total student population at the school.
- Team composition, capability, and experience, including:
 - A description of the capacity of the eligible entity to provide services and comprehensive support to make the energy improvements.
- Implementation plan for Phase 2, including:
 - A draft work plan of the intended achievements of the eligible entity at the school.
 - A description of the energy improvements that the eligible entity would carry out at the school if the application were approved.
 - An assessment of the expected needs of the eligible entity for operation and maintenance training funds, and a plan for use of those funds, if applicable.
- Impact and replicability: strategic partnership and scalability.

In the technical narrative, competitors should also address organizational background (including the history and state of the school facilities identified in the portfolio), high-level project goals, project impacts to student learning and growth, and other relevant details.

A template is provided to help organize the narrative. Use of this template is encouraged but not required. The suggestions in the technical narrative template are not meant to be prescriptive or restrictive; the competitor should decide how to best structure their response. Templates can be found on the [HeroX](#) platform under the Resources tab.

2. Energy Justice Mapping Tool Reports (Template¹⁸ Provided as Needed)

(No page limit, but reports must be combined into a single PDF document)

DOE developed the Energy Justice Mapping Tool for Schools (<https://energyjustice-schools.egs.anl.gov>) to help competitors derive relevant needs information on a school-by-school basis. Competitors must use this tool to generate a report for information regarding each school/school facility within the submission. All reports should be included with the application submission as a stand-alone attachment combined into one singular PDF.

Competitors who are unable to locate and generate a PDF report from the Energy Justice Mapping Tool for Schools (<https://energyjustice-schools.egs.anl.gov/>) are required to use the energy justice template report, posted on the [HeroX](#) platform under the Resources tab, to generate a one-page maximum report for each school/school facility within the submission. Please note, competitors should only use this template if they are unable to locate their school within the Energy Justice Mapping Tool for Schools.

Please upload a single PDF document to the [HeroX](#) platform that includes the one-page summary report per school/school facility. For example: if the portfolio has 10 schools, the PDF document uploaded will be 10 pages long.

3. School Energy Assessment Tool Reports (Template¹⁷ Provided)

(No page limit, submitted as a ZIP folder with Microsoft Excel files)

Competitors must use DOE's School Energy Assessment (SEA) form to generate a facility condition report, which is a needs assessment of the current condition of the school and school facilities that would receive the energy improvements. The SEA form and additional trainings are available at <https://www.energy.gov/scep/school-needs-and-benefits-assessment-resources>.

For each school/school facility, save the SEA form as an excel file. Combine all the files into a ZIP folder to upload to the HeroX platform. Please note that the HeroX platform will only accept one file; this should be a ZIP file, not exceeding 50 MB, containing more than one SEA form Excel file. For instructions on how to create a ZIP folder, see [Zip and unzip files - Microsoft Support](#).

4. Community Benefits Plan (Template¹⁷ Provided)

(Five pages maximum, including cover page, submitted as a PDF)

The community benefits plan (CBP) sets forth the competitor's approach to ensuring federal investments advance the following four goals:

1. Community and labor engagement
2. Investing in quality jobs
3. Advancing DEIA
4. Contributing to the Justice40 initiative.

A template is provided to help organize the CBP. Use of this template is encouraged but not required. The suggestions in the CBP template are not meant to be prescriptive or restrictive; the competitor should decide how to best structure their response. Templates can be found on the [HeroX](#) platform under the Resources tab.

In the CBP, the competitor should address the following:

1. Community and Labor Engagement. The CBP must describe the competitor's actions to date and future plans to engage with labor unions and community stakeholders, such as local governments, Tribal governments, and community-based organizations that support or work with disadvantaged communities as defined for purposes of the Justice40 initiative.

2. Investing in Quality Jobs. A well-qualified, skilled, and trained workforce is necessary to ensure project stability, continuity, impact, and success of meeting program goals. High-quality jobs are critical to attracting and retaining the qualified workforce required.

The CBP must describe the competitor's approach to investing in workforce education and training of both new and incumbent workers and ensuring jobs are of sufficient quality to attract and retain skilled workers in the industry.

¹⁷ To assist teams, DOE is providing an elective template to illustrate the types of information needed to evaluate whether teams meet minimum requirements in the associated critical success factors. Teams are not required to use this template and may submit using any form or format of their choosing. All submissions should address the substantive measures outlined in the template and described in this Official Prize Rules document.

3. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility. The CBP must include a section describing how DEIA objectives are addressed by the competitor's organization and will be incorporated into future prize and cooperative agreement work. Examples include partnerships with underrepresented businesses, educational institutions, and training organizations that serve workers who face barriers to accessing quality jobs, and/or other project partners to help address DEIA.

4. Justice40 initiative. Competitors must provide an overview of how their proposed portfolio and project plans benefit disadvantaged communities. This section should identify specific disadvantaged communities to which the anticipated project benefits will flow. Benefits include, but are not limited to, measurable direct or indirect investments or positive project outcomes that achieve or contribute to the following in disadvantaged communities: (1) a decrease in energy burden; (2) a decrease in environmental exposure and burdens; (3) an increase in access to low-cost capital; (4) an increase in high-quality job creation, the clean energy job pipeline, and job training for individuals; (5) increases in clean energy enterprise creation and contracting (e.g., business enterprises in disadvantaged communities or other socially disadvantaged enterprises); (6) increases in energy democracy, including community ownership; (7) increased parity in clean energy technology access and adoption; and (8) an increase in energy resilience. Competitors should determine whether any disadvantaged communities, as identified in the Energy Justice Mapping Tool for Schools (which aligns with the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool), or any federally recognized Tribes or Tribal entities (whether or not they have land) will benefit from the proposed portfolio and project plan.

5. Resumes

(One page maximum per individual, submitted as a PDF)

A resume provides information used by reviewers to evaluate an individual's relevant skills and experience. Competitors must submit a one-page resume for each project manager and key personnel that includes the following:

- Contact information
- Education, including all academic institutions attended, major/area, degree(s)
- Training (e.g., certification or credential from a registered apprenticeship or labor management partnership)
- Professional experience, beginning with the current position and listing professional/academic positions in chronological order with a brief description
- All current academic, professional, or institutional appointments, foreign or domestic, at the applicant institution or elsewhere, whether or not remuneration is received, and whether full time, part time, or voluntary.

Each resume must not exceed one page per individual. Combine all letters into a single PDF document for submission.

6. Letters of Commitment

(One page maximum per letter, submitted as a PDF)

Letters from portfolio schools/LEAs and any other key project partners identified at the time of application should be submitted. These letters should state the entity's intent to participate in the proposed project and their role(s) should the project move forward.

Each letter must not exceed one page. Combine all letters into a single PDF document for submission.

7. Summary Slide (To Be Made Public; Template¹⁸ Provided)

(One slide maximum, submitted as a PowerPoint)

Competitors must provide a single, public-facing slide summarizing the proposed project. The summary slide must include the following information:

- Project name
- Project description
- Summary of need (community, facility)
- Project goals
- Any key graphics (illustrations, charts, and/or tables).

A summary slide template is provided. Using the template is encouraged but not required. Templates can be found on [HeroX](#) under the Resources tab.

1.7. How Winners Are Determined

The prize administrator screens all completed submissions and assigns a panel of DOE-approved subject matter expert reviewers to independently score the content of each submission. DOE's SCEP considers input from expert reviewers and makes the final decision on all winners. DOE will designate a federal employee as the prize judge before the final determination of the winners. Final determination of the winners by the judge will consider the reviewers' feedback and scores and application of program policy factors (see Appendix A.13).

All items in the submission package, with the exception of the cover pages, will be considered when scoring each submission. After reviewing all elements of the submission package, expert reviewers will assign a score between 1 and 6 for each of the following five criteria:

Table 4. Submission Package Scoring

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

The scoring of submissions will proceed as follows:

- Reviewers will review each submission individually and assess the response from the competitor to each statement in the five criteria described next.
- Reviewers will assign a score to each criterion, with scores ranging from 1 to 6 (see Table 4), depending on the degree to which the reviewer agrees that the submission reflects the statements for consideration.

¹⁸ To assist teams, DOE is providing an elective template to illustrate the types of information needed to evaluate whether teams meet minimum requirements in the associated critical success factors. Teams are not required to use this template and may submit using any form or format of their choosing. All submissions should address the substantive measures outlined in the template and described in this Official Prize Rules document.

- Each section score will be added together to generate a total score for the submission.
- The total scores from each reviewer will be averaged to produce a final score for the competing team/organization. This score will inform the selection official's decisions on prize awards.

Each criterion will be weighted as follows and is broken down into several sub-criteria of equal weight.

Criterion 1: Need for Planning and Energy Assessments (20%)

The competitor should describe their intended portfolio of schools and school facilities, and their need(s), as measured by the following parameters:

- **Facilities.** Extent to which schools or school facilities identified in the portfolio exhibit a high need for energy assessments and may require energy improvements (e.g., age of school, deferred maintenance, fiscal/capital constraints for facility, services, high energy costs, failing systems, and/or others).
- **Community.** Degree to which the project is based in and serves a community of high need (e.g., rural schools, and schools serving a high percentage of students qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch).

Criterion 2: Team Composition, Capability, and Experience (20%)

The competitor should introduce their proposed project team and outline the team's core competencies:

- **Project team composition.** Demonstrate that the team has the necessary experience, team, and relationships to successfully implement their plan (both in energy and financing).
- **Experience.** Demonstrate that the team members have a successful track record within relevant sectors (such as energy efficiency, renewable energy, school infrastructure, financing).
- **Commitment.** Demonstrate that the team has documented that all needed team members will be in place and ready to commit the time needed to accomplish the stated goals for Phase 2.

Criterion 3: Implementation Plan for Phase 2 (20%)

The competitor should develop their plan for Phase 2 (energy audits/energy assessments, financial analyses, and strategy for implementation of upgrades), addressing:

- **Plan.** Adequacy, reasonableness, and soundness of the project plan to complete the required strategic plan and ASHRAE Level 2 energy audits within the time allotted to Phase 2 (9–12 months).
- **Schedule.** Likelihood of successfully maintaining schedule proposed for Phase 2 and demonstrate how they will accomplish key milestones toward meeting project goal(s).

Criterion 4: Impact and Replicability (20%)

The competitor should situate their project within larger sustainability, decarbonization, and clean energy goals, demonstrating how pivotal aspects of their project can be extrapolated to different sites and contexts through strategic use of:

- **Partnerships.** Extent to which the project strategically leverages partnerships including energy-related performance contracting.
- **Benefits.** The potential benefits in terms of cost savings, air-quality improvements, and emissions reductions from full implementation of the project.
- **Scalability.** Extent to which the project addresses replicability and scalability of the project, both within the competitor's LEA and/or by external LEAs. Should include plans to build on this work within the LEA, disseminate strategies and lessons learned to external LEAs, and/or collaborate with other LEAs on pursuing energy efficiency and renewable energy technologies.

Criterion 5: Community Benefits Plan (20%)

The CBP must set forth the competitor's approach to ensuring that federal investments advance the following four goals: 1) community and labor engagement, 2) investing in job quality and workforce continuity, 3) advancing DEIA, and 4) contributing to the Justice40 initiative, such as:

- **Community and labor engagement.** Extent to which competitor’s CBP illustrates project viability and social risk mitigation through community and labor engagement.
- **Workforce.** Extent to which competitor’s CBP illustrates investment in the American workforce.
- **DEIA.** Extent to which competitor’s CBP illustrates DEIA goals.
- **Justice40.** Extent to which competitor’s CBP illustrates Justice40 initiative benefits to disadvantaged communities.

1.8. Additional Terms and Conditions

The prize administrator, working with DOE, has the right to refuse any submission for incompleteness or non-responsiveness to the topic area of this prize.

See Appendix A for additional requirements. COMPETITORS WHO DO NOT COMPLY WITH THE ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS IN APPENDIX A MAY BE DISQUALIFIED.

1.9. Ineligible Submissions

Ineligible submissions will not be further reviewed or considered for award. The prize administrator will send a notification letter by email to the individual identified as the submission owner in the HeroX platform. The notification letter will state the basis upon which the submission is ineligible and not considered for further review.

2. Cooperative Agreement (Phase 2 and 3)

2.1. Introduction

Competitively selected Phase 1 winners will be invited to negotiate cooperative agreements with DOE. In Phase 2 (Strategic Plan and Energy Audits), these winners (also referred to as recipients) will begin by conducting energy audits/energy assessments and financial analyses. Using the results of these studies, each recipient will develop a strategic plan and implementation framework for energy improvements.

Energy improvements in Phase 3 (Implementation) may take the form of repairs, renovations, or installations to the facility envelope, air-conditioning system, ventilation system, heating system, domestic hot water heating system, compressed air system, distribution system, lighting system, power system, and/or controls of a building. Projects may also include renewable energy improvements, such as rooftop solar, micro wind turbines, alternative fueled vehicle infrastructure and purchase or lease of alternative fueled vehicles. Costs related to electrifying end uses to take advantage of clean energy from the electric grid are also eligible improvements. Packaging multiple improvements for deeper energy savings and carbon reductions is encouraged.

2.2. Cooperative Agreement Process

Winners from Phase 1 will receive a schedule for award negotiations. The selection official reserves the right to down-select the number of Phase 1 winners that will enter into negotiations with DOE for a cooperative agreement for Phase 2 and Phase 3 funding. During negotiations, each selectee will work with project officers from DOE's SCEP to create a SOPO and other selection documents (see Section 0.4). Failure to engage in timely communication with project officers and submit documents as requested may result in the termination of award negotiations.

A DOE 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 plans to accomplish project activities with reasonable economy and efficiency.

DOE reserves the right to terminate award negotiations at any time for any reason. DOE reserves the right, without qualification, to reject any or all applications received in response to this prize-to-cooperative agreement and to select any application, in whole or in part, as a basis for negotiation and/or award.

2.3. Award Overview

2.3.1 Office of State and Community Energy Programs Funding Agreements

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

2.3.2 Estimated Funding

DOE expects to make a total of approximately \$90,000,000 of federal funding available for awards through both the prize and cooperative agreement, subject to the availability of appropriated funds. DOE anticipates making up to 14 awards under this prize-to-cooperative agreement structure. Individual total

award values may vary between \$7 and \$14 million, depending on the portfolio size submitted in Phase 1: Prize.

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

2.3.3 Period of Performance

SCEP anticipates making awards that will run up to 60 months in length across Budget Period 1 and 2. Typically, SCEP 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, SCEP 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, SCEP 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.

2.4. What to Submit for Phase 2 Continuation Application

DOE intends to invite Phase 1 winners to enter into negotiations with DOE to receive federal awards ranging between \$7 and \$14 million for Phases 2 and 3. The selection official reserves the right to down-select the number of Phase 1 winners that will enter into negotiations with DOE for a cooperative agreement for Phase 2 and Phase 3 funding. Federal funds allocated for Phases 2 and 3 depend on the number of schools/school facilities within the portfolio (see Table 1). The cooperative agreement will have two distinct phases (also referred to as two budget periods). **DOE requires a minimum of 5% cost share for the cooperative agreement in Phase 2, and minimum 25% for the cooperative agreement in Phase 3.** For more information about cost share requirements, see the [2025 Cooperative Agreement Requirements](#) document.

- In Phase 2 (Strategic Plan and Energy Audits), recipients will conduct energy audits/energy assessments and financial analyses. DOE intends to fund this part of the cooperative agreement from \$500,000 to \$1 million each (federal share only), depending on the number of schools and school facilities defined in the portfolio of the winning competitor's Phase 1 submission. Recipients will develop comprehensive project plans and implementation frameworks based on results of the energy audits/energy assessments and financial analyses. Strategic plans will be made public as case studies for other schools, school districts, and partnering organizations.
 - Deliverables for the end of Phase 2 (Budget Period 1) continuation application will include but are not limited to the following:
 - Full construction budget (see [Cooperative Agreement Requirements](#) document for Davis-Bacon Act requirements)
 - A cost estimate of the proposed energy improvements
 - Letter(s) of commitment for cost share minimum for Phase 3 (25% of total project costs or more)
 - ASHRAE Level 2 energy audits
 - Strategic plan (to be made public)–Purpose: Work plan of the intended achievements at the school/school facilities, including:

- A description of the energy improvements at the school/school facility that includes details of energy conservation measures and planned renewables for implementation.
- A maintenance plan that assesses the expected needs for operation-and-maintenance training funds, and a plan for use of those funds.
- An assessment of the expected energy efficiency, energy savings, and safety benefits of the energy improvements.
- A plan to implement [Build America, Buy America](#) (see *Cooperative Agreement Requirements* document).
- A plan to implement the Davis Bacon Act (see the *Cooperative Agreement Requirements* document).
- A financial analysis and plan.
- A plan to leverage opportunities such as the Internal Revenue Service's Elective Pay, 179D, or State Revolving Loan Funds established by BIL Section 40502 and including:
 - An identification of other resources that are available to carry out the activities including grant funds and the availability of utility programs and/or public benefit funds.
 - An updated SOPO with a schedule of tasks and milestones.
 - An updated CBP.
- In Phase 3 (Implementation), DOE intends to fund energy improvements identified during Phase 2. DOE intends to fund this phase of the cooperative agreement from \$7 to \$14 million (federal share only) per award, depending on the number of schools and school facilities defined in the portfolio of the winning competitor's Phase 1 submission. In addition to DOE federal funds, the cooperative agreement is funded in part by required cost share through other leveraged funds.

Appendix A: Prize Terms and Conditions

A.1 Universal Contest

Your submission for the U.S. Department of Energy’s Office of State and Community Energy Programs (SCEP) is subject to the following terms and conditions:

- You must post the final content of your submission or upload the submission form online at the HeroX platform before the program deadline. SCEP 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 nonsubstantive 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 the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (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.
 - Note: NREL serves as the prize administrator. DOE makes selections for the prize award, but NREL awards the prize. DOE will then manage the cooperative agreement.
- 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 DOE 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 Official Prize Rules, which apply only to the contest described here and to no other contest on the HeroX platform or elsewhere.
- 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 Prize 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 submitter, whether consisting of single or multiple entities. The primary submitter is solely responsible for allocating any prize funds among its member competitors or teammates as they deem appropriate. The prize administrator will not arbitrate, intervene, advise on, or resolve any matters or disputes between team members or competitors.

A.4 Submission Rights

By making a submission and consenting to the Official Prize Rules of the contest, a competitor is granting to DOE, NREL, 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 purposes. 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, the 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.

Neither the prize administrator nor DOE will 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 SCEP, 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

Competitors should not include trade secrets or business-sensitive, proprietary, or otherwise confidential information in their application unless such information is necessary to convey an understanding of the proposed project or to comply with a requirement in the Notice of Funding Opportunity. Competitors are advised to not include any critically sensitive proprietary detail.

If an application includes trade secrets or business-sensitive, proprietary, or otherwise confidential information, it is furnished to the federal government in confidence with the understanding that the information shall be used or disclosed only for evaluation of the application. Such information will be withheld from public disclosure to the extent permitted by law, including the Freedom of Information Act. Without assuming any liability for inadvertent disclosure, DOE will seek to limit disclosure of such information to its employees and to outside reviewers when necessary for merit review of the application or as otherwise authorized by law. This restriction does not limit the federal government’s right to use the information if it is obtained from another source.

If a competitor chooses to submit trade secrets or business-sensitive, proprietary, or otherwise confidential information, the competitor must provide two copies of the submission (e.g., concept paper, full application). The first copy should be marked “non-confidential,” with deleted trade secrets or business-sensitive, proprietary, or otherwise confidential information. The second copy should be marked “confidential” and must clearly and conspicuously identify the trade secrets or business-sensitive, proprietary, or otherwise confidential information and must be marked as described below. Failure to comply with these marking requirements may result in the disclosure of the unmarked information under the Freedom of Information Act or otherwise. The federal government is not liable for the disclosure or use of unmarked information and may use or disclose such information for any purpose as authorized by law.

The cover sheet of the full application, and other submission materials must be marked as follows and identify the specific pages containing trade secrets or business-sensitive, proprietary, or otherwise confidential information:

Notice of Restriction on Disclosure and Use of Data:

Pages [list applicable pages] of this document may contain trade secrets or business-sensitive, proprietary, or otherwise confidential information that is exempt from public disclosure. Such information shall be used or disclosed only for evaluation purposes or in accordance with a financial assistance agreement between the submitter and the government. The government may use or disclose any information that is not appropriately marked or otherwise restricted, regardless of source. [End of Notice]

In addition, (1) the header and footer of every page that contains trade secrets or business-sensitive, proprietary, or otherwise confidential information must be marked as follows: “Contains Business Sensitive Information, Trade Secrets, or Proprietary or Otherwise Confidential Information Exempt from Public Disclosure,” and (2) every line or paragraph containing such information must be clearly marked with double brackets or highlighting. DOE will make its own determination about the confidential status of the information and treat it according to its determination.

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 may indicate 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 or cooperative agreement.

DOE may conduct a risk review, using government resources, of the competitor and project personnel for potential risks of foreign interference. The outcomes of the risk review may result in the submission being eliminated from the prize competition. This risk review, and potential elimination, can occur at any time during the prize competition. An elimination based on a risk review is not appealable.

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 following program policy factors may be considered in determining winners:

- The degree to which the proposed project, or group of projects, represent a desired geographic distribution (considering past awards under the Renew America's Schools program and current applications), including whether the project is in a community that is facing job and revenue loss in the energy transition.
- The degree to which the selectee's schools serve a high percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch or have a designated school district local code of 41, 42, or 42 as determined by the National Center for Educational Statistics in consultation with the U.S. Census Bureau.
- The degree to which the application leverages private sector investment through energy-related performance contracting.
- The degree to which the proposed project collectively represents diverse types and sizes of competitors which represent diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility principles.
- The degree to which the project's solution, schedule, or strategy will maximize deployment or replication.
- The degree to which the project provides targeted services to vulnerable or underrepresented communities.¹⁹
- The extent of the disparity between the fiscal capacity of the eligible entity to carry out energy improvements at school facilities and the needs of the partnering local educational agency for those energy improvements, including consideration of:
 - The current and historic ability of the partnering local educational agency to raise funds for construction, renovation, modernization, and major repair projects for schools.
The ability of the partnering local educational agency to issue bonds or receive other funds to support the current infrastructure needs of the partnering local educational agency for schools.
 - The bond rating of the partnering local educational agency.
- The level of buy-in and participation and by project participants as evidenced by letter(s) of commitment.

¹⁹ "Underrepresented" refers to populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that are shown to have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life, as exemplified by communities that have been denied fair, just, and impartial treatment, which may include women, persons with disabilities, persons who live in rural areas, persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality, veterans, members of religious minorities, Black, Latino, Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, other persons of color, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons.