



# Energizing Rural Communities Prize

March 1, 2023

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# Preface

The U.S. Department of Energy's Energizing Rural Communities Prize will be governed by 15 U.S.C. §3719 and this Official Rules document. This is not a procurement under the Federal Acquisitions Regulations and will not result in a grant or cooperative agreement under 2 CFR 200. The Prize Administrator reserves the right to modify this Official Rules document if necessary and will publicly post any such modifications as well as notify registered prize participants.



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# Acronyms

CDFI	Community Development Financial Institution
DOE	U.S. Department of Energy
ERA	Energy Improvements in Rural or Remote Areas
NREL	National Renewable Energy Laboratory
OCED	Office of Clean Energy Demonstrations
RFI	Request for Information
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound



# 1 Introduction

The Energizing Rural Communities Prize is being offered by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Office of Clean Energy Demonstrations (OCED) to incentivize the development of clean energy projects in rural or remote areas of the United States.

The prize offers a \$15 million cash prize pool to kickstart development of clean energy projects. This prize is intended to incentivize competitors to take the first steps necessary to develop a clean energy project. The competitor should have an idea for a future clean energy project, but no construction is required as part of this prize.

This prize seeks to:

- Demonstrate innovative and replicable partnership and financial mechanisms that act as initial steps toward clean energy projects.
- Better prepare rural or remote communities to secure funding for clean energy projects, either through future Energy Improvements in Rural or Remote Areas (ERA) funding opportunities or other public or private funding sources.
- Identify, understand, and further develop activities that prepare communities to complete clean energy projects.
- Build trust and strengthen the networks between and within rural and remote communities in support of energy improvements aligned with DOE’s Justice40 priorities.<sup>1</sup>

This prize contains two individual tracks, PARTNER and FINANCE, each with two phases. In Phase One, competitors should develop a plan to accomplish the goals above. The plan should include proposed activities, milestones, and metrics measuring the impact and demonstrating the success of proposed activities by leading to targeted outcomes.

As summarized in the table below, Phase One winners will receive a cash prize of \$100,000, mentorship, and will be eligible to compete in Phase Two. In Phase Two, winning competitors will be awarded an additional cash prize of \$200,000 based on achievement of milestones and metrics demonstrating success, as proposed during Phase One. Phase Two competitors are expected to leverage prize funding to implement their plan developed in Phase One.

Track	PARTNER: \$10 million cash prize pool	FINANCE: \$5 million cash prize pool
Phase One Prizes	Up to 60 cash prizes of \$100,000 each and in-kind mentorship services	Up to 30 cash prizes of \$100,000 each and in-kind mentorship services
Phase Two Prizes	Up to 20 awards of \$200,000 each, selected based on plan implementation	Up to 10 awards of \$200,000 each, selected based on plan implementation

<sup>1</sup> DOE’s eight policy priorities for disadvantaged communities, developed in support of the Justice40 Initiative (which directs 40% of the overall benefits of certain Federal investments—including investments in clean energy and energy efficiency—to flow to disadvantaged communities), include: decrease energy burden; decrease environmental exposure and burdens; increase parity in clean energy technology access and adoption; increase access to low-cost capital; increase clean energy enterprise creation and contracting; increase clean energy jobs, job pipeline, and job training; increase energy resiliency; and increase energy democracy in disadvantaged communities. <https://www.energy.gov/diversity/justice40-initiative>.



A successful submission must demonstrate that the project benefits a rural or remote area. The term “rural or remote area” is defined by Section 40103(c) of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) as a “city, town, or unincorporated area that has a population of not more than 10,000 inhabitants.” Applications must identify at least one area in the United States (including U.S. territories) with a population of not more than 10,000 (using 2020 Census Bureau figures) that benefits from the proposal. The identified area must be either: (a) a city, town, or other incorporated municipality, or (b) a Census Designated Place or similarly discreet and identifiable community that is not located within an incorporated municipality. See Appendix B for additional information on this requirement. The terms “rural or remote area,” “rural or remote community,” and “community” are used interchangeably throughout this document.

Submissions from individuals, organizations, and communities that historically have not received DOE funding are encouraged.

## 1.1 Key Dates

- **Phase One Opens:** March 1, 2023
- **Phase One Closes:** May 24, 2023
- **Phase One Winner Announcement and Awards:** July 2023
- **Phase Two Opens:** July 2023
- **Phase Two Closes:** July 2024
- **Phase Two Winner Announcements and Awards:** August 2024

*All dates are anticipated and subject to change.*



## 2 Background and Program Goals

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, commonly referred to as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), directs DOE to invest \$1 billion in energy improvements in rural or remote areas. DOE's [Energy Improvements in Rural or Remote Areas \(ERA\) Program](#) will provide financial investment, technical assistance, and other resources to advance clean energy demonstrations and energy solutions that are replicable and scalable. The ERA Program aims to fund clean energy projects with three specific goals:

- **Deliver measurable benefits to energy customers in rural or remote areas** by funding energy projects that lower energy cost, improve energy resilience, and/or reduce environmental harm.
- **Demonstrate new rural or remote energy system models** using climate-resilient technologies, new business structures that promote economic resilience, new financing mechanisms, and/or new community engagement best practices.
- **Build clean energy knowledge, capacity, and self-reliance in rural America.**

This prize is a cornerstone of the ERA Program and is intended to provide early funding for clean energy project development preparation. In addition to this prize, DOE intends to issue additional funding opportunities for constructing clean energy projects under the ERA Program.

Successful competitors will propose partnership and financial activities that advance clean energy projects in rural or remote communities for the purpose of:

- A) Improving the overall cost-effectiveness of energy generation, transmission, or distribution systems
- B) Siting or upgrading transmission and distribution lines
- C) Reducing greenhouse gas emissions
- D) Providing or modernizing electric generation facilities
- E) Developing microgrids
- F) Increasing energy efficiency.

This prize is intended as a first step toward a clean energy project, and no construction is required at this stage.

### 2.1 Ensuring Benefits to Rural or Remote Communities

Principles of equity and justice will guide implementation of this program, consistent with the Biden Administration's commitments to ensure that overburdened, underserved, and underrepresented individuals and communities have equitable access to federal resources and receive benefits from federal investments. ERA Program implementation efforts will follow the Biden Administration's Justice40 goals, which aim for 40% of the overall benefits from Federal investments in climate, clean energy and energy efficiency, and job training and workforce development to flow to disadvantaged communities. ERA investments should not exacerbate existing inequities, such as disproportionate exposure to environmental hazards and harms, or create new harms, but should instead maximize benefits to communities. The ERA Program will work to advance equity and justice for all, including people of color and others who have been historically underserved and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality.

To ensure that these benefits spread equitably across affected communities, competitors should describe how the project will support community and workforce engagement, invest in the American workforce,



advance energy and environmental justice, and promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA).

Replicability is key to market adoption of technologies to benefit rural or remote areas beyond those participating in the ERA Program. Achieving replicability requires that barriers to installing and operating energy projects in rural or remote communities are mitigated. As such, the program seeks to build confidence of decision-makers, such as financiers, utilities, and tribal, state, and local governments, who would enable replication. Competitors in this prize are encouraged to propose partnership and financing mechanisms that could be replicated in other rural or remote communities.

## 2.2 Prize Goals

This prize contains two individual tracks: PARTNER and FINANCE. The goals of each track are:

1. **PARTNER TRACK GOALS:** Facilitate new or existing partnerships that enable development of clean energy projects in rural or remote communities. Successful competitors will create connections that lead to collaborative efforts for the development of clean energy projects in rural or remote communities. Collaborative efforts could include providing engineering services to advance project concepts, encouraging multiple communities to aggregate similar energy projects to unlock economies of scale, or facilitating equipment acquisition.
2. **FINANCE TRACK GOALS:** Connect communities to capital for current or future clean energy projects by developing innovative and functional business models, new approaches to financing clean energy projects, the expansion of existing business models to new rural and remote areas, and innovative ways to leverage other fiscal incentives such as tax credits.

This plan should propose activities the competitor aims to pursue during Phase Two of the prize and targeted outcomes these activities aim to deliver. The plan should also demonstrate the previous experience and resources the competitor will leverage in Phase Two and how proposed activities will contribute to a rural or remote community's clean energy goals. Competitors will be evaluated on how well their plans address the scoring criteria for each track, as described in Sections 3 and 4.

Proposed activities and targeted outcomes will vary by track, but examples are provided below. Competitors are not limited to these examples and are encouraged to propose activities and outcomes that will be most impactful in advancing the community's energy vision. It is critical that the plan include milestones and metrics measuring the impact and demonstrating the success of proposed activities. These metrics will guide the selection process under both tracks and will help shape the evaluation of a competitor's implementation of their proposed activities should they be eligible to compete in Phase Two.

Successful competitors will demonstrate strong ties to rural or remote communities and will show how they will serve as bridges between DOE and rural or remote communities with whom DOE may not have previously engaged.

The Prize Administrator will perform an initial screening of the community a competitor aims to serve. Competitors must identify at least one area in the United States (including U.S. territories) with a population of not more than 10,000 (using 2020 Census Bureau figures) that benefits from the submission. The identified area must be either: (a) a city, town, or other incorporated municipality or (b) a Census Designated Place or similarly discreet and identifiable community that is not located within an incorporated municipality. Submissions that do not satisfy this requirement will be considered ineligible and removed from further evaluation. See Appendix B for more information on this requirement.

Competitors may submit multiple applications to both tracks, but the Prize Administrator will only accept and review **one submission per track per community served. The community served will be evaluated for initial eligibility as a rural or remote community and screened for duplication based on the 9-digit zip code**





**AND name of city, town, incorporated municipality, Census Designated Place, or other unincorporated area provided by the competitor on the HeroX platform.** Additional information on the HeroX platform and submission process is provided in Sections 3 and 4, detailing the requirements for both tracks.

**If a competitor is unsure of which track they should apply to, they can apply for consideration into both tracks. Should a competitor submit the same submission under both tracks, that submission can only win a cash prize in one track. Competitors with separate, distinct submissions to each track may win a cash prize in both tracks, if DOE determines that the submissions are sufficiently distinct and meritorious.**

## 2.2.1 PARTNER Track

The PARTNER Track encourages competitors to form new or leverage existing partnerships to facilitate clean energy projects in rural or remote areas of the United States. Formal partnership formation should advance the development of clean energy projects focusing on improving the resilience, safety, reliability, and availability of energy, and reducing the adverse environmental impacts from energy generation by rural or remote communities. The maturity of the partnerships proposed through this track will be considered in the evaluation, with preference given to established, formal relationships with organizations capable of supporting clean energy projects. Maturity of the partnership should be demonstrated with evidence of a strong commitment to development of a clean energy project. Evidence could include letters of commitment, memoranda of understanding, contracts, and/or funding agreements.

While we do not expect competitors to construct clean energy projects as part of this prize, competitors must have a vision for a clean energy project they intend to pursue in a rural or remote community that is supported by their proposed activity. Partnership activities pursued under this track should advance completion of this project. Competitors are encouraged to think creatively about what partnership activities would most directly benefit the clean energy project, but some example activities could include:

- Building relationships among multiple rural or remote communities that intend to improve resilience of their electricity systems through upgrading transmission and distribution lines
- Building relationships among multiple rural or remote communities to achieve economies of scale by aggregation of equipment procurement or engineering services
- Creating a project development team within an organization to facilitate the development of a clean energy project, such as creating a team that might include developers, community stakeholders, financiers, and others that are responsible for working with a utility to create a legal pathway for interconnecting a clean energy project
- Identifying regional impacts of climate change that reduce the resilience and reliability of local energy systems, such as droughts, wildfires, hurricanes, or other significant weather events, and developing plans to improve energy systems to mitigate climate change impacts
- Developing a contract between a local government and a clean energy training organization to build a local workforce to support a specific clean energy project.

Successful submissions will include a description of the targeted outcome the competitor aims to deliver at the completion of Phase Two. Some example outcomes may include:

- Project permitting
- Preliminary engineering studies or designs
- Renewable energy resource assessments
- Utility analysis or offtake agreements
- Hiring and building a team to complete the project
- Co-signed memorandum of understanding between the partnering organizations that outlines what they aim to achieve
- Creation of a new multi-stakeholder organization



- Other outcomes critical to improving clean energy deployment in rural or remote communities.

Targeted outcomes must connect to the clean energy project the competitor ultimately plans to construct.

DOE seeks submissions from energy project developers; nonfederal governments; utilities; community-based organizations with expertise in clean energy deployment, infrastructure, or resilience; or other organizations or individuals with creative ideas to help rural or remote communities connect with partners that enable improving the resilience, safety, reliability, and availability of energy as well as environmental protection from adverse impacts of energy generation. Competitors are encouraged to form diverse teams while preparing their Phase One submission.

## 2.2.2 FINANCE Track

The FINANCE Track encourages competitors to improve access to capital for clean energy projects in rural or remote areas of the United States. Goals of submissions to the FINANCE Track could include: enabling rural or remote communities to access conventional financing for energy projects, creating pathways for communities to pursue unconventional capital, connecting finance partners that want to expand businesses to support clean energy projects for the benefit of rural or remote areas, or other creative ideas for improving access to capital for clean energy projects in rural or remote communities. FINANCE Track competitors are encouraged to demonstrate these ideas but also illustrate the ability to replicate their model in other rural or remote communities.

Competitors must identify one or more barriers that rural or remote communities face in financing clean energy projects. Financing activities pursued under this track should result in targeted outcomes that help overcome this barrier, either for a specific clean energy project or a type of clean energy project that is supported by the activity proposed. Competitors are encouraged to think creatively about what financing activities would most effectively enable access to capital for rural communities. Some examples of these activities could include:

- Conduct a market assessment to determine potential demand for and guide design of a clean energy loan program tailored to rural or remote communities.
- Determine interest by utility customers or credit union members in a community solar project through community outreach.
- Identify sources of additional funding and develop a capital-raising strategy.
- Issue a Request for Information (RFI) to gather data from project developers.
- Train staff who will be evaluating loan applications for clean energy projects.
- Conduct community outreach to identify local partners.
- Identify which Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) tax credits and incentives are available for projects in a specific rural or remote community.
- Partner with an organization with expertise in rural or remote communities to assist in design of financial products.

Successful submissions will include a description of the targeted outcome the competitor aims to deliver at the completion of Phase Two. Some example outcomes may include:

- A credit union or a green bank starts to offer loans and other financial support for clean energy projects in one or more rural and remote communities.
- A utility launches a new community solar project and begins subscribing customers in a rural or remote community.
- A financial institution helps a nonprofit organization qualify clean energy projects for financing.
- A project developer demonstrates the feasibility of a unique financing model for a clean energy project in a rural or remote community.



- A financial institution develops resources explaining how rural electric cooperatives can incorporate IRA tax credits and incentives into a variety of clean energy projects in rural or remote communities.
- A local or regional government successfully attracts clean energy investment into a rural or remote community within its jurisdiction.
- A rural electric cooperative implements a plan to finance sustained operation and maintenance of an existing or new clean energy system.

DOE seeks submissions from energy project developers; nonfederal governments; utilities; community development financial institutions<sup>2</sup> and credit unions; green banks and related loan funds that can adapt their current business models to rural or remote communities; or other organizations with creative ideas to help rural or remote communities fill funding gaps for clean energy projects. Competitors are encouraged to form diverse teams while preparing their Phase One submission.

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<sup>2</sup> Community development financial institutions are financial institutions, such as banks, credit unions, loan funds, or venture capital funds, that have been certified as Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) by the U.S. Department of the Treasury. CDFI Certification is the U.S. Department of the Treasury's recognition of specialized financial institutions serving low-income communities.



# 3 PARTNER Track: Submission Requirements and Review Process

## 3.1 How To Enter

Go to [HeroX](#) and follow the instructions for registering and submitting all required materials before the deadline in the Key Dates Section 1.1 and as displayed on the [HeroX](#) website.

Competitors also have the ability to form teams or find partners through the HeroX platform and are encouraged to form multidisciplinary teams while developing their concept. The HeroX platform provides a space where parties interested in collaboration can post information about themselves and learn about others who are also interested in competing.

## 3.2 What To Submit

The following items constitute the Phase One submission package for the PARTNER Track and must be submitted through the [HeroX platform](#). Each item is described in more detail below.

The Prize Administrator will perform an initial screening of the community that a submission aims to serve. Competitors must identify at least one area in the United States (including U.S. territories) with a population of not more than 10,000 (using current Census Bureau figures) that benefits from the proposal. The identified area must be either: (a) a city, town, or other incorporated municipality, or (b) a Census Designated Place or similarly discreet and identifiable community that is not located within an incorporated municipality. Submissions that do not satisfy this requirement will be considered ineligible and removed from further evaluation.

The following items are required for each submission:

Item	Will Be Made Public <sup>3</sup>	Scored Item
Cover Page	Yes	No
Summary Slide	Yes	No
Three-Minute Video Pitch	Yes	Yes
Partnership Plan and Evidence of Commitment	No	Yes

### 3.2.1 Unscored, Public-Facing Submission Materials

#### 3.2.1.1 Cover Page

The Cover Page, included in the final submission, will be made public. List basic information about the submission, including:

- Title
- Competitor name

<sup>3</sup> Competitors who do not want any documents not already intended to be public-facing to be made public will need to mark them according to the instructions in Appendix A (Section A.10).



- Organization (name, contact information, web link, 9-digit zip code)
- Location of primary benefits. This is the rural or remote area<sup>4</sup> that benefits from the proposed plan (9-digit zip code and name of city, town, or unincorporated area [Census Designated Place]).
  - **Note that, in this prize, a successful submission must demonstrate that the proposed activity will benefit a rural or remote area. If this information is not included, the submission will be determined ineligible and will not be reviewed.**
- Short description of proposed plan, activities, and use of the prize funds
- Link to the 3-minute, online video pitch
- Project members (names and high-level backgrounds of team members)
- Other partners (if any).

### 3.2.1.2 Summary Slide

Make a public-facing, one-slide submission summary that introduces the competitor and mission. There is no template, so competitors are free to present information in any format. Any text must be readable on a standard printed page and a conference room projection and should be in at least a 14-point font.

## 3.2.2 Scored Items: Three-Minute Video Pitch and Partnership Plan

The scored items in the Phase One submission package are the 3-minute video pitch and the partnership plan. Scored materials will be evaluated on how well they address scoring statements in the respective criterion; each statement (described below) will be scored from 1–6, as shown here.

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

The following table explains how the scores for each submission will be calculated.

Criteria	Number of Scored Statements	Percentage of Total Score (approximate)	Total Possible Points
Three-Minute Video	3	12.5%	18
Partnership Plan and Evidence of Commitment	21	87.5%	126
Criterion 1: Relevant Experience	4	17%	24
Criterion 2: Proposed Partnership Activities	6	25%	36

<sup>4</sup> The term “rural or remote area” is defined as a city, town, or unincorporated area that has a population of not more than 10,000 inhabitants. Competitors must identify at least one area in the United States (including U.S. territories) with a population of not more than 10,000 (using current Census Bureau figures) that benefits from the proposal. The identified area must be either: (a) a city, town, or other incorporated municipality, or (b) a Census Designated Place or similarly discreet and identifiable community that is not located within an incorporated municipality. Submissions that do not satisfy this requirement will be considered ineligible and removed from further evaluation.

During Phase Two of the Prize			
<b>Criterion 3:</b> Expected Outcomes, Impacts, and Success Metrics	4	17%	24
<b>Criterion 4:</b> Budget, Staff, and Other Resources	4	17%	24
<b>Criterion 5:</b> Strategy for Achieving Community Energy Goals After Completion of the Prize	3	11.5%	18
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>144</b>

### 3.2.2.1 Three-Minute Video Pitch

Produce a 3-minute video that will help the reviewers and public understand the competitor, any partnering organizations, and planned activity. Suggested content for the video is noted in the lefthand side of the following table. The righthand side of the table includes the scored statements that the reviewers will use to evaluate submissions. Individual reviewers will assign a score between 1 and 6 for each scored statement after reviewing the submission.

Be creative and convey information in a fun and engaging way. Reviewers will focus on the content, not the quality, of the video production. Upload the video online to a publicly accessible platform (e.g., YouTube, Vimeo).

Scoring Criteria: Three-Minute Video Pitch	
<p><b>Suggested Content Competitor Provides</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An introduction to the competitor and experience working with rural or remote communities</li> <li>• A high-level description of the targeted partnership(s) the competitor aims to build or improve should the submission be selected</li> <li>• An explanation of the need and impact the proposed partnership(s) aims to achieve specific to the community or communities this submission will support</li> <li>• A description of how these partnership(s) will help better prepare the community for future clean energy projects</li> </ul>	<p><b>Each Statement Scored on a 1–6 Scale</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The competitor has demonstrated that they have experience in collaborating with rural or remote communities.</li> <li>• The proposed partnership(s) that the competitor aims to build or leverage will contribute to the development of clean energy projects within one or more rural or remote communities.</li> <li>• The competitor has demonstrated that they will have access to, or can obtain, the necessary resources and capabilities to execute their proposed plan.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An explanation of how the submission aligns with one or more goals of the prize stated in Section 2.2 of this document.</li> </ul>	
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### 3.2.2.2 Partnership Plan and Evidence of Commitment

Write a detailed partnership plan in a narrative describing the competitor, planned activities, resources and capabilities, and anticipated outcomes. [A template is available](#) to use in drafting the partnership plan. The partnership plan should address the Prize Goals in Section 2.2 of this document and be guided by the following scoring criteria.

The total word count of the partnership plan cannot exceed **5,000** words. This plan may include up to **five** supporting visualizations or graphics. The partnership plan may also include evidence of commitment from organizations with which a competitor will be partnering, such as letters of commitment, memoranda of understanding, contracts, and/or funding agreements. Evidence of commitment does not contribute to the word or visualization limit in the partnership plan. Information contained in hyperlinks to external sources, and any text or graphics beyond the designated limits, will not be reviewed or considered.

#### Evaluation Criteria for Partnership Plan

Five criteria must be addressed in the partnership plan and evidence of commitment:

- Criterion 1:** Relevant Experience
- Criterion 2:** Proposed Partnership Activities During Phase Two of the Prize
- Criterion 3:** Expected Outcomes, Impacts, and Success Metrics
- Criterion 4:** Budget, Staff, and Other Resources
- Criterion 5:** Strategy for Achieving Community Energy Goals After Completion of the Prize.

The following tables describe the content that the competitor should provide in the submission to successfully address each criterion. The righthand column contains the scored statements that the reviewers will be using for each of the five criteria. Individual reviewers will assign a score between 1 and 6 for each scored statement after reviewing the submission. The lefthand column includes suggested content that addresses each criterion. The suggested content provided is not mandatory. Rather, these are examples of details you may include to help guide responses. Competitors are welcome to use other information as applicable, as long as it effectively addresses the scored statements listed on the right.

Criterion 1: Relevant Experience	
Suggested Content Competitor Provides	Each Statement Scored on a 1–6 Scale
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A description of the mission of the competitor and how it aligns with goals of the prize stated in Section 2.2 of this document</li> <li>A description of the competitor’s previous experience working with rural or remote communities</li> <li>A description of the competitor’s previous experience working with overburdened and underserved communities, as</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The competitor has demonstrated experience in successfully working with rural or remote communities, particularly those that are overburdened and underserved.</li> <li>The competitor has demonstrated experience and current capabilities in at least one of the following areas: community-driven economic development; development of clean energy projects; or</li> </ul>



<p>indicated by <a href="#">DOE's Energy Justice Dashboard</a>, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) <a href="#">EJScreen</a>, or another explanation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A description of established practices the competitor has used to evaluate the success or failure of previous efforts and incorporate lessons learned into subsequent efforts</li> <li>• A description of experiences, insights, or lessons learned by the competitor from strategies—both successful and unsuccessful—to support the development of renewable energy or other infrastructure in rural or remote communities.</li> </ul>	<p>development of infrastructure in rural or remote areas.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The competitor has clearly articulated practices to evaluate the success or failure of past efforts.</li> <li>• The competitor has clearly articulated lessons learned from prior collaboration efforts and how those practices will inform this activity.</li> </ul>
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## Criterion 2: Proposed Partnership Activities During Phase Two of the Prize

Suggested Content Competitor Provides	Each Statement Scored on a 1–6 Scale
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A description of proposed activities the competitor aims to carry out that will form partnerships to facilitate clean energy projects in rural or remote communities, connect these communities to engineering services or other resources to support clean energy projects, and/or aggregate similar energy projects in multiple rural or remote communities</li> <li>• A description of the competitor's plan to build trust and strengthen relationships with overburdened and underserved communities, as indicated by <a href="#">DOE's Energy Justice Dashboard</a>, <a href="#">EPA's EJScreen</a>, or another explanation.</li> <li>• A description of how proposed activities are likely to increase access to funding for rural or remote communities</li> <li>• A description of strategies and methods the competitor can use to build trust and strengthen relationships and partnerships with and within rural or remote communities or organizations within the clean energy ecosystem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The competitor's proposed activities are likely to build trust and strengthen relationships and partnerships with and within rural or remote communities, particularly within overburdened and underserved communities.</li> <li>• The competitor's proposed activities are likely to enable partnerships that achieve the ultimate goal of clean energy projects in rural or remote communities.</li> <li>• The competitor's proposed partnership activities are likely to result in the mutual alignment of organizations toward delivery of a clean energy project, as defined in Section 2.2.1, and/or other resources that support clean energy projects in rural or remote communities.</li> <li>• The competitor's proposed activities are likely to result in increased access to federal, state, or local government or private funding for rural or remote communities.</li> <li>• The competitor provides a detailed description of the activities and milestones that support the proposal's goals.</li> </ul>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A detailed description of activities and milestones and how they support achieving the goals of the proposal</li> <li>• A timeline, outlined as a Gantt chart or similar, for implementing the activity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The competitor provides a timeline that is ambitious yet achievable for accomplishing the outlined milestones.</li> </ul>
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### Criterion 3: Expected Outcomes, Impacts, and Success Metrics

<p><b>Suggested Content Competitor Provides</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A description of the outcomes and impacts of the activity that will determine its success</li> <li>• A description of how outcomes improve partnerships supporting a clean energy project in a rural or remote community</li> <li>• A description of credible methods and metrics to evaluate the progress of the competitor’s activities, such as through <b>Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound (SMART) goals</b></li> <li>• A description of how the competitor’s goals align with the prize goals</li> <li>• A description of ambitious and achievable deliverables that the competitor will accomplish during the 12 months after receiving funding from this prize.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Each Statement Scored on a 1–6 Scale</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The competitor has clearly communicated the anticipated outcomes and impacts of the proposed activity and how this activity will improve partnerships supporting a clean energy project in a rural or remote community.</li> <li>• The competitor has proposed specific, quantifiable goals (such as SMART goals) and metrics to evaluate whether the proposed activities have achieved these goals.</li> <li>• The competitor’s end-of-activity deliverables are achievable and will yield measurable success in meeting one or more of the prize goals.</li> <li>• The described plan has a high likelihood for success (1 or 6).</li> </ul>
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### Criterion 4: Budget, Staff, and Other Resources

<p><b>Suggested Content Competitor Provides</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A budget for the proposed activity</li> <li>• A description of staff resources the competitor can use to execute the proposed activity</li> <li>• A description of any other resources and strategies the competitor plans to utilize to execute the proposed activity, which may include technical resources and facilities.</li> <li>• Evidence of commitment from target partner organization(s) that conveys their openness to building or improving a partnership, such as letters of</li> </ul>	<p><b>Each Statement Scored on a 1–6 Scale</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The description of proposed activities during Phase Two of the prize and associated budget, in alignment with award funding, are of adequate detail and indicate a high likelihood of ultimately delivering the proposed outcomes.</li> <li>• The staff resources that will be available to the competitor, or that the competitor plans to obtain, are adequate for achieving the stated goals.</li> <li>• The competitor has demonstrated that they will have access to, or can obtain,</li> </ul>
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<p>commitment, memoranda of understanding, contracts, and/or funding agreements.</p>	<p>the necessary resources and capabilities to execute their proposed activity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The competitor has submitted evidence of commitment that demonstrates intent from target organizations in building or improving a partnership.</li> </ul>
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<b>Criterion 5: Strategy for Achieving Community Energy Goals After Completion of the Prize</b>	
<p><b>Suggested Content Competitor Provides</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A description of the rural or remote community or communities the team serves and their goals for energy improvement related to resilience, safety, reliability, and availability, as well as reduction of adverse environmental impacts from energy generation</li> <li>• A description of the clean energy project the team plans to construct and how it improves the resilience, safety, reliability, and availability of energy, and reduces the adverse environmental impacts from energy generation in rural or remote communities</li> <li>• A description of the competitor’s plans to maintain or grow partnerships to provide support to rural or remote communities leading to the development of a clean energy project</li> <li>• A description of the vision and goals resulting from participation in the prize</li> <li>• A description of how participation in the prize and the described activity would result in overcoming systemic barriers to energy improvements in rural or remote communities</li> <li>• A description of how the proposed project could be replicated in other rural or remote communities.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Each Statement Scored on a 1–6 Scale</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The competitor has clearly described the rural or remote community’s goals for energy improvement after completion of Phase Two of this prize related to resilience, safety, reliability, and availability, and reduction of adverse environmental impacts from energy generation; and, if available, a description of the clean energy project the team plans to construct to achieve these goals.</li> <li>• The competitor has described how prize activities, and partnerships formed therein, will advance the community’s goals for energy improvement and/or a specific clean energy project.</li> <li>• The competitor’s plan is likely to result in a replicable model to improve partnerships in other rural or remote communities, particularly by demonstrating partnership methods that overcome systemic barriers.</li> </ul>

### 3.3 How We Determine and Award Winners

The Prize Administrator screens all completed submissions and ensures that the competitors are eligible. Then the Prize Administrator, in consultation with DOE, assigns subject matter expert reviewers who independently score the content of each submission. The reviewers will be composed of federal and nonfederal subject matter experts with expertise in areas relevant to the competition. They will review the



competitor's submitted video pitches and partnership plans according to the evaluation criteria described in Section 3.2.2.

### 3.3.1 Reviewer Panel Scoring

The scoring of submissions will proceed as follows:

- Experts will review each submission individually and assess the response from the competitor in relation to each scoring statement on the righthand side of the tables in Sections 3.2.2.1 and 3.2.2.2.
- Reviewers will score each statement from 1–6, aside from those noted as a binary scoring statement, depending on the degree to which the reviewer agrees that the submission reflects the statement. This review scale is defined in Section 3.2.2.
- Each statement score will be added together to generate a total score for the submission, which can be up to 144 points, as described in the table in Section 3.2.2.
- The total scores from each reviewer will be averaged to produce a final score for the competitor. This score will inform the judge's decisions on prize awards.

### 3.3.2 Interviews

DOE may decide to interview a subset of competitors. The interviews would be held before the announcement of the winners and would serve to help clarify questions the reviewers may have. Participating in interviews is not required, and interviews are not an indication of a competitor's likelihood to win.

### 3.3.3 Final Determination

Final determination of the winners is based on the reviewers' feedback and scores, application of program policy factors, and the interview findings (if applicable).

### 3.3.4 Announcement

Approximately 30 days after the contest closes, the Prize Administrator will notify the winners and request the necessary information to distribute the prizes. The Prize Administrator will then publicly announce the winners.

## 3.4 Additional Terms and Conditions

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



# 4 FINANCE Track: Submission Requirements and Review Process

## 4.1 How To Enter

Go to [HeroX](#) and follow the instructions for registering and submitting all required materials before the deadline in the Key Dates Section 1.1 or as displayed on the [HeroX](#) website.

Competitors also have the ability to form teams or find partners through the HeroX platform. In keeping with the goal of growing a community of innovators, competitors are encouraged to form multidisciplinary teams while developing their concept. The HeroX platform provides a space where parties interested in collaboration can post information about themselves and learn about others who are also interested in competing in this contest.

## 4.2 What To Submit

The following items constitute the Phase One submission package for the FINANCE Track and must be submitted through the [HeroX platform](#). Each is described in more detail below.

The Prize Administrator will perform an initial screening of the community that a submission aims to serve. Competitors must identify at least one area in the United States (including U.S. territories) with a population of not more than 10,000 (using current Census Bureau figures) that benefits from the proposal. The identified area must be either: (a) a city, town, or other incorporated municipality, or (b) a Census Designated Place or similarly discreet and identifiable community that is not located within an incorporated municipality. Submissions that do not satisfy this requirement will be considered ineligible and removed from further evaluation.

The following items are required for each submission:

Item	Will Be Made Public <sup>5</sup>	Scored Item
Cover Page	Yes	No
Summary Slide	Yes	No
Three-Minute Video Pitch	Yes	Yes
Project Plan and Financial Statement	No	Yes

### 4.2.1 Unscored, Public-Facing Submission Materials

#### 4.2.1.1 Cover Page

The Cover Page, included in the final submission, will be made public. List basic information about the submission, including:

- Title
- Competitor name
- Organization (name, contact information, web link, 9-digit zip code)

<sup>5</sup> Competitors who do not want any documents not already intended to be public-facing to be made public will need to mark them according to the instructions in Appendix A (Section A.10).



- Location of primary benefits. This is the rural or remote area<sup>6</sup> that benefits from the proposed plan (9-digit zip code and name of city, town, or unincorporated area [Census Designated Place]).
  - **Note that, in this prize, a successful submission must demonstrate that the proposed activity will benefit a rural or remote area. If this information is not included, the submission will be determined ineligible and will not be reviewed.**
- Short description of proposed plan, activities, and use of the prize funds
- Link to the 3-minute, online video pitch
- Project members (names and high-level backgrounds of team members)
- Other partners (if any).

#### 4.2.1.2 Summary Slide

Make a public-facing, one-slide submission summary that introduces the competitor and mission. There is no template, so competitors are free to present information in any format. Any text must be readable on a standard printed page and a conference room projection and should be in at least a 14-point font.

### 4.2.2 Scored Items: Three-Minute Video Pitch, Project Plan and Financial Statement

The scored items in the Phase One submission package are the 3-minute video pitch and the project plan. Scored materials will be evaluated on how well they address scoring statements in the respective criterion; each statement (described below) will be scored from 1–6, as shown here.

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

The following table explains how the scores for each submission will be calculated:

Criteria	Number of Scored Statements	Percentage of Total Score (approximate)	Total Possible Points
Three-Minute Video	4	15.4%	24
Project Plan and Financial Statement	22	84.6%	132
Criterion 1: Relevant Experience	5	19.2%	30
Criterion 2: Proposed Activities During Phase Two of the Prize	6	23%	36

<sup>6</sup> The term “rural or remote area” is defined as a city, town, or unincorporated area that has a population of not more than 10,000 inhabitants. Competitors must identify at least one area in the United States (including U.S. territories) with a population of not more than 10,000 (using current Census Bureau figures) that benefits from the proposal. The identified area must be either: (a) a city, town, or other incorporated municipality, or (b) a Census Designated Place or similarly discreet and identifiable community that is not located within an incorporated municipality. Submissions that do not satisfy this requirement will be considered ineligible and removed from further evaluation.

<b>Criterion 3:</b> Expected Outcomes, Impacts, and Success Metrics	4	15.4%	24
<b>Criterion 4:</b> Budget, Staff, and Organizational Structure	3	11.6%	18
<b>Criterion 5:</b> Strategy for Future Funding After the Completion of the Prize	4	15.4%	24
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>156</b>

### 4.2.2.1 Three-Minute Video Pitch

Produce a 3-minute video that will help the reviewers and public understand the competitor, any partnering organizations, and the planned activity. Suggested content for the video is noted in the lefthand side of the following table. The righthand side of the table includes the scored statements that the reviewers will use to evaluate submissions. Individual reviewers will assign a score between 1 and 6 for each scored statement after reviewing the project submission.

Be creative and convey information in a fun and engaging way Reviewers will focus on the content, not the quality, of the video production. Upload the video online to a publicly accessible platform (e.g., YouTube, Vimeo).

<b>Scoring Criteria: Three-Minute Video Pitch</b>	
<p><b>Suggested Content Competitor Provides</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An introduction to the competitor’s background, including partnering organizations (if any), and experience working with rural or remote communities</li> <li>• A description of the team’s experience providing loans and other forms of financial and technical support to low- and moderate-income households and businesses that serve these households</li> <li>• A high-level description of the proposed project and anticipated impact within the community or communities, should the project be selected</li> <li>• Description of existing resources and capabilities to successfully execute the proposed activity.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Each Statement Scored on a 1–6 Scale</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The competitor has demonstrated that they have experience in collaborating with rural or remote communities.</li> <li>• The team has demonstrated experience in providing loans and other forms of financial and technical support to low- and moderate-income households or businesses that serve these households.</li> <li>• The proposed activity the team aims to implement is valuable, impactful, and will contribute to the clean energy projects within a rural or remote community, directly or indirectly.</li> <li>• The competitor has demonstrated that they will have access to, or can obtain, the necessary resources and capabilities to execute their proposed activity.</li> </ul>

### 4.2.2.2 Project Plan and Financial Statement

Write a detailed project plan in a narrative format describing the competitor, planned activities, resources and capabilities, and anticipated impacts. [A template is available](#) to use in drafting the project plan. The project plan should address the Prize Goals stated in Section 2.2 of this document. Responses in the narrative should be guided by the suggested content and evaluation criteria in the following section.

The total word count of the project plan cannot exceed **5,000** words. This document may include up to **five** supporting visualizations or graphics. Information contained in hyperlinks to external sources will not be reviewed or considered by the reviewers or the judge. The supporting financial statement (not included in the word and graphic count limit) should be included as an appendix to the project plan, detailing the relevant financial information to showcase the near-term budget for the activity and viability of this program without the guarantee of sustained funding through this mechanism.

### Evaluation Criteria for Project Plan and Financial Statement

There are five criteria that need to be addressed in the scored submission materials:

1. **Criterion 1:** Relevant Experience
2. **Criterion 2:** Proposed Activities During Phase Two of the Prize
3. **Criterion 3:** Expected Outcomes, Impacts, and Success Metrics
4. **Criterion 4:** Budget, Staff, and Organizational Structure
5. **Criterion 5:** Strategy for Future Funding After the Completion of this Prize.

The following tables describe the content that the competitor should provide in the submission to successfully address each criterion. The righthand column contains the scored statements that the reviewers will be using for each of the five criteria. Individual reviewers will assign a score between 1 and 6 for each scored statement after reviewing the submission. The lefthand column includes suggested content that addresses each criterion. The suggested content provided is not mandatory; rather, these are examples of details to include to help guide responses. Competitors are welcome to use other information as applicable, as long as it effectively addresses the scored statements listed on the right.

<b>Criterion 1: Relevant Experience</b>	
<b>Suggested Content Competitor Provides</b>	<b>Each Statement Scored on a 1–6 Scale</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A description of the mission of the competitor and how it aligns with one or more goals of the prize stated in Section 2.2 of this document</li> <li>• A description of the experience of the competitor in working with rural or remote communities, including specific connections the competitor has to relevant organizations within rural or remote communities and successful engagement strategies</li> <li>• A description of the competitor’s previous experience working with overburdened and underserved communities, as indicated by <a href="#">DOE’s Energy Justice Dashboard</a>, <a href="#">EPA’s EJScreen</a>, or another explanation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The competitor’s mission is in alignment with the stated goals of the prize, as described in Section 2.2.</li> <li>• The competitor has demonstrated experience in successfully working with rural or remote communities, particularly those that are overburdened and underserved.</li> <li>• The competitor has demonstrated experience and current capabilities in at least one of the following areas: providing financial services and related support, financing clean energy projects in rural or remote communities, or related experiences that can be applied to these communities.</li> </ul>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A description of experience related to financing and other forms of financial support, including engagement with low- and moderate-income households and businesses</li> <li>• A description of experience the competitor has in financing clean energy projects including energy efficiency</li> <li>• A description of types of activities the competitor has carried out in securing funding from federal, state, or local government or private (for-profit or nonprofit) funding</li> <li>• A description of experiences, insights, or lessons learned by the competitor from past efforts that have been effective or unsuccessful in engaging rural or remote communities, including attempts to address climate change and energy justice issues.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The competitor has demonstrated the ability to secure funding from third parties.</li> <li>• The competitor has clearly articulated practices to evaluate the success or failure of past efforts and has plans to incorporate lessons learned from those experiences into the implementation of this project.</li> </ul>
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**Criterion 2: Proposed Activities During Phase Two of the Prize**

<b>Suggested Content Competitor Provides</b>	<b>Each Statement Scored on a 1–6 Scale</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The proposed project plan, including a detailed description of the activities, milestones, and goals that will result in increased access to capital in rural and remote communities</li> <li>• A description of how the competitor’s project plan results in greater access to capital in overburdened and underserved communities, as indicated by <a href="#">DOE’s Energy Justice Dashboard</a>, <a href="#">EPA’s EJScreen</a>, or another explanation</li> <li>• A description of how the project plan is innovative</li> <li>• A description of how the project plan addresses financing barriers in the targeted communities</li> <li>• A timeline, outlined as a Gantt chart or similar, for implementing the activity in collaboration with a rural or remote community</li> <li>• A description of project partners and their roles in implementing the plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The competitor’s project plan is likely to result in greater access to capital in rural and remote communities, particularly those that are overburdened and underserved.</li> <li>• The competitor clearly demonstrates that the proposed activity is innovative.</li> <li>• The competitor clearly demonstrates that the proposed plan addresses barriers in financing clean energy projects within the targeted communities.</li> <li>• The competitor provides a timeline that is ambitious yet achievable for accomplishing the outlined milestones.</li> <li>• The competitor provides a clear description of partners and their roles in implementing the activity, and they are likely to support the activity’s success.</li> <li>• The competitor demonstrates existing community support for the activity or a clear plan to include the community.</li> </ul>





<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An overview of a community engagement strategy required to successfully implement the project plan and demonstrate community buy-in.</li> </ul>
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**Criterion 3: Expected Outcomes, Impacts, and Success Metrics**

<p><b>Suggested Content Competitor Provides</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A description of the outcomes of the activity that will determine its success</li> <li>A description of how outcomes translate into sustainable benefits to the community</li> <li>A description of credible methods and metrics to evaluate the competitor’s progress, such as through <b>S</b>pecific, <b>M</b>easurable, <b>A</b>chievable, <b>R</b>elevant, and <b>T</b>ime-Bound (SMART) goals</li> <li>A description of the competitor’s plan for collecting the metrics necessary to measure success.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Each Statement Scored on a 1–6 Scale</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The competitor has clearly communicated the anticipated impacts of the proposed activity and the value implementing this project will have for rural or remote communities.</li> <li>The competitor’s metrics to evaluate successes and goals are well-suited for providing an accurate indication of success in funding future clean energy projects, such as SMART goals.</li> <li>The competitor has clearly communicated a methodology to collect specific metrics representative of the project’s success.</li> <li>The described plan has a high likelihood for success (1 or 6).</li> </ul>
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**Criterion 4: Budget, Staff, and Organizational Structure**

<p><b>Suggested Content Competitor Provides</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A budget for the proposed activity</li> <li>A description of the staff resources the competitor can use to execute the proposed activity, and/or hiring plans to fill identified gaps</li> <li>A description of other resources and strategies the competitor plans to utilize to implement the proposed activity</li> <li>A description of existing organizational infrastructure or support provided by partners in rural or remote communities that will offer this organizational infrastructure to deliver on the project plan.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Each Statement Scored on a 1–6 Scale</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The description of the proposed activity and associated budget, in alignment with award level, are of adequate detail and indicate that the activities are achievable.</li> <li>The competitor has demonstrated that they will have access to, or can obtain, the necessary resources (either in-house or external) and capabilities to achieve the stated goals for the proposed plan.</li> <li>The proposed organizational structure, including the use of partners, is appropriate to meet the expected outcomes as presented in the project plan.</li> </ul>
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## Criterion 5: Strategy for Future Funding After the Completion of the Prize

Suggested Content Competitor Provides	Each Statement Scored on a 1–6 Scale
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A description of the proposed strategy to ensure sustainability within the selected community after completion of Phase Two of this Prize</li><li>• A description of how the proposed plan is replicable in other rural or remote communities</li><li>• A description of the proposed funding sources that will be obtained to ensure the success of the program after completion of the prize</li><li>• A description of the anticipated impacts this project could have after completion of the prize.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The proposed plan includes a well thought out strategy to ensure sustainability after completion of Phase Two of this Prize.</li><li>• The proposed plan can be replicated to other rural or remote communities.</li><li>• The proposed future funding sources to maintain and expand the proposed financial program are realistic and achievable.</li><li>• The expected results from the program after completion of the prize are achievable and impactful.</li></ul>

## 4.3 How We Determine and Award Winners

The Prize Administrator screens all completed submissions and ensures that the teams are eligible. Then the Prize Administrator, in consultation with DOE, assigns subject matter expert reviewers who independently score the content of each submission. The reviewers will be composed of federal and nonfederal subject matter experts with expertise in areas relevant to the competition. They will review the competitor’s submitted video pitches and partnership/project plans according to the evaluation criteria described in Section 4.2.

### 4.3.1 Reviewer Panel Scoring

The scoring of submissions will proceed as follows:

- Experts will review each submission individually and assess the response from the competitor in relation to each scoring statement on the righthand side of the tables in Sections 4.2.2.1 and 4.2.2.2.
- Reviewers will score each statement from 1–6, aside from those noted as a binary scoring statement, depending on the degree to which the reviewer agrees that the submission reflects the statement. This review scale is defined in Section 4.2.2.
- Each statement score will be added together to generate a total score for the submission, which can be up to 156 points, as described in the table in Section 4.2.2, following the review scale.
- The total scores from each reviewer will be averaged to produce a final score for the competitor. This score will inform the judge’s decisions on prize awards.

### 4.3.2 Interviews

DOE may decide to interview a subset of competitors. The interviews would be held before the announcement of the winners and would serve to help clarify questions the reviewers may have. Participating in interviews is not required, and interviews are not an indication of a competitor’s likelihood to win.



### 4.3.3 Final Determination

Final determination of the winners is based on the reviewers' feedback and scores, application of program policy factors, and the interview findings (if applicable).

### 4.3.4 Announcement

Approximately 30 days after the contest closes, the Prize Administrator will notify the winners and request the necessary information to distribute the prizes. The Prize Administrator will then publicly announce the winners.

## 4.4 Additional Terms and Conditions

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



# Appendix A: Additional Terms and Conditions

## A.1 Requirements

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

- You must post the final content of your submission or upload the submission form online by 5 p.m. ET on May 24, 2023, before the submission period closes. Late submissions or any other form of submission may be rejected.
- All submissions that you wish to protect from public disclosure must be marked according to the instructions in Section A.10 of this appendix. 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 elements in your submission. 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 submission errors due to technical challenges.
- Your submission must be in English and in a format readable by Microsoft Word or Adobe PDF. Scanned hand-written submissions will be disqualified.
- Submissions will be disqualified if they contain any matter that, in the sole discretion of the U.S. Department of Energy or the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL), is indecent, obscene, defamatory, libelous, and/or lacking in professionalism, or demonstrates a lack of respect for people or life on this planet.
- If you click "Accept" on the HeroX platform and proceed to register for any of the prizes described in this document, these rules will form a valid and binding agreement between you and DOE and are in addition to the existing HeroX Terms of Use for all purposes relating to these contests. You should print and keep a copy of these rules. These provisions only apply to the prize described here and no other prize on the HeroX platform or anywhere else.
- The Prize Administrator, when feasible, may give competitors an opportunity to fix non-substantive mistakes or errors in their submission packages.
- Winners are expected to cover any travel costs with prize funds.
- As part of your submission to this prize, you will be required to sign the following statement:

I am providing this submission package as part of my participation in this prize. 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 prize 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.

## A.2 Verification for Payments

The Prize Administrator will verify the identity and role of all competitors before distributing any 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 for the individual or entity that was responsible for the submission. Each competitor will be required to sign and return to the Prize Administrator, within 30 days of the date on the notice, a completed NREL Request for ACH Banking Information form and a completed W9 form (<https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/fw9.pdf>). In 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 does not respond to notifications; (ii) the person/entity fails to sign and return the required documentation within the required time period; (iii) the notification is returned as undeliverable; (iv) the submission or person/entity is disqualified for any other reason.

In the event of a dispute as to any registration, 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. All competitors may be required to show proof of being the authorized account holder.

## A.3 Teams and Single-Entity Awards

The Prize Administrator will award a single dollar amount to the designated primary submitter, whether consisting of a 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 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 purposes. This license includes posting or linking to the public portions of the submission on the Prize Administrator or HeroX applications, including 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, Prize Administrator, and judges and reviewers 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 competitors' names and, as applicable, the names of competitors' team members and organization, which participated in the submission on the contest website indefinitely.

By entering, the competitor represents and warrants that:

1. The competitor's entire submission is an original work by the competitor and the competitor has not included third-party content (such as writing, text, graphics, artwork, logos, photographs, likeness of any third party, musical recordings, clips of videos, television programs, or motion pictures) in or in connection with the submission, unless (i) otherwise requested by the Prize Administrator and/or disclosed by the competitor in the submission, and (ii) competitor has either obtained the rights to use such third-party content or the content of the submission is considered in the public domain without any limitations on use.
2. Unless otherwise disclosed in the submission, the use thereof by Prize Administrator, or the exercise by Prize Administrator of any of the rights granted by competitor under these rules, does not and will not infringe or violate any rights of any third party or entity, including, without limitation, patent, copyright, trademark, trade secret, defamation, privacy, publicity, false light, misappropriation, intentional or negligent infliction of emotional distress, confidentiality, or any contractual or other rights.
3. All persons who were engaged by the competitor to work on the submission or who appear in the submission in any manner have:
  - a. Given the competitor their express written consent to submit the submission for exhibition and other exploitation in any manner and in any and all media, whether now existing or hereafter discovered, throughout the world;



- b. Provided written permission to include their name, image, or pictures in or with the submission (or, if a minor who is not competitor's child, competitor must have the permission of the minor's parent or legal guardian) and the competitor may be asked by the Prize Administrator to provide permission in writing; and
- c. Not been and are not currently under any union or guild agreement that results in any ongoing obligations resulting from the use, exhibition, or other exploitation of the submission.

## 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 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 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 award is 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.

Neither DOE nor the Prize Administrator will arbitrate, intervene, advise on, or resolve any matters between team members or among competitors.

## A.8 Publicity

The winners of these prizes (collectively, "winners") will be featured on DOE, NREL, and other DOE National Laboratory 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 any and all risks of injury or loss in connection with or in any way arising from participation in this contest. 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 judge responsible for this prize, the judge has determined that no liability insurance naming DOE as an insured will be required



of competitors to compete in this competition per 15 U.S.C. § 3719(i)(2). Competitors should assess the risks associated with their proposed activities and adequately insure themselves against possible losses.

## A.10 Records Retention and Freedom of Information Act

All materials submitted to DOE as part of a submission become DOE records and are subject to the Freedom of Information Act. The following applies only to portions of the submission not designated as public information in the instructions for submission. If a submission includes trade secrets or information that is commercial or financial, or information that is confidential or privileged, it is furnished to the 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 review of the application or as otherwise authorized by law. This restriction does not limit the Government's right to use the information if it is obtained from another source.

Submissions containing confidential, proprietary, or privileged information 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 U.S. Government is not liable for the disclosure or use of unmarked information and may use or disclose such information for any purpose.

The submission must be marked as follows and identify the specific pages containing trade secrets, confidential, proprietary, or privileged information: "Notice of Restriction on Disclosure and Use of Data: Pages [list applicable pages] of this document may contain trade secrets, confidential, proprietary, or privileged information that is exempt from public disclosure. Such information shall be used or disclosed only for evaluation purposes. [End of Notice]"

The header and footer of every page that contains confidential, proprietary, or privileged information must be marked as follows: "Contains Trade Secrets, Confidential, Proprietary, or Privileged Information Exempt from Public Disclosure." In addition, each line or paragraph containing proprietary, privileged, or trade secret information must be clearly marked with double brackets.

Competitors will be notified of any Freedom of Information Act 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 Freedom of Information Act representative prior to the release of materials. DOE does intend to keep all submission materials private except for those materials designated as "will be made public."

## 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 prize, 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 prize, as determined by DOE in its sole discretion, DOE may cancel the prize. Any performance toward prize goals is conducted entirely at the risk of the competitor and DOE shall not compensate any competitors for any activities performed in furtherance of this prize.

Although DOE may indicate that it will select up to several winners for each prize, 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.

## A.13 Program Policy Factors

While the scores of the expert reviewers will be carefully considered, it is the role of the prize judge to maximize the impact of prize 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:

- Geographic diversity and potential economic impact of projects.
- Whether the use of additional DOE funds and provided resources are non-duplicative and compatible with the stated goals of this program and the DOE mission generally.
- The degree to which the submission exhibits technological or programmatic diversity when compared to the existing DOE project portfolio and other competitors.
- The degree to which the submission is likely to lead to increased employment and manufacturing in the United States or provide other economic benefits 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.

## A.14 National Environmental Policy Act Compliance

This prize is subject to the National Environmental Policy Act (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 <http://nepa.energy.gov/>.

While NEPA compliance is a federal agency responsibility and the ultimate decisions remain with the federal agency, all participants in the Energizing Rural Communities Prize will be required to assist in the timely and effective completion of the NEPA process in the manner most pertinent to their participation in the prize competition. Participants may be asked to provide DOE with additional information on the proposed activities such that DOE can conduct a meaningful evaluation of the potential environmental impacts.

## A.15 Return of Funds

As a condition of receiving a prize, competitors agree that if the prize was made based on fraudulent or inaccurate information provided by the competitor to DOE, DOE has the right to demand that any prize funds or the value of other non-cash prizes be returned to the government.





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

## A.16 Eligibility and Competitors

The competition is open only to private entities (for-profits and nonprofits), non-federal government entities such as states, counties, tribes, and municipalities, academic institutions, and individuals, 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.
- Academic institutions must be based in the United States.
- An individual prize competitor or group of competitors who are not competing as part of an incorporated private entity must all be United States citizens or legal permanent residents.
- Individuals competing as part of an incorporated private entity may participate if they are legally allowed to work 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 six 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.
- 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.
- This prize competition is expected to positively impact U.S. economic competitiveness. Participation in a foreign government talent recruitment program<sup>7</sup> could conflict with this objective by resulting in unauthorized transfer of scientific and technical information to foreign government entities. Therefore, individuals participating in foreign government talent recruitment programs of foreign countries of risk are not eligible to compete. Further, teams that include individuals participating in foreign government talent recruitment programs of foreign countries of risk<sup>8</sup> are not eligible to compete.
- As part of your submission to this prize program, you will be required to sign the following statement:

I am providing this submission package as part of my participation in this prize. 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 prize

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<sup>7</sup> Foreign government talent recruitment program is defined as an effort directly or indirectly organized, managed, or funded by a foreign government to recruit science and technology professionals or students (regardless of citizenship or national origin, and 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 physically relocate to the foreign state for the above purpose. Some programs allow for or encourage continued employment at U.S. 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.

<sup>8</sup> Currently, the list of countries of risk includes Russia, Iran, North Korea, and China.

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.



# Appendix B: Determining the Population of a Rural or Remote Community

## B.1 Definitions

**Rural or Remote Area:** The term “rural or remote area” is defined by Section 40103(c) of the BIL as a “city, town, or unincorporated area that has a population of not more than 10,000 inhabitants.” Applications must identify at least one area in the United States (including U.S. territories) with a population of not more than 10,000 (using 2020 Census Bureau figures) that benefits from the proposal. The identified area must be either: (a) a city, town, or other incorporated municipality, or (b) a Census Designated Place or similarly discreet and identifiable community that is not located within an incorporated municipality. Applications that do not satisfy this requirement will be considered ineligible and removed from further evaluation.

**Census Designated Place:** The U.S. Census Bureau defines a Census Designated Place (CDP) as a statistical geography representing closely settled, unincorporated communities that are locally recognized and identified by name. CDPs are statistical equivalents of incorporated places and represent unincorporated communities that do not have a legally defined boundary or an active, functioning governmental structure. Examples of CDPs include unincorporated communities, planned communities, military installments, university towns, and resort towns. A single location cannot be part of both an incorporated place and a CDP.

**Incorporated Municipality:** An incorporated municipality is legally incorporated under state law, has a legally defined boundary, and has an active functioning governmental structure. Examples of incorporated municipalities include cities, towns, and villages. A single location cannot be part of both an incorporated place and a CDP<sup>9</sup>.

**Unincorporated Area:** For the purposes of this prize, “unincorporated area” refers to a Census Designated Place or similarly discreet and identifiable community that is not located within an incorporated municipality.

## B.2 Using U.S. Census Bureau Data to Determine Community Population

The U.S. Census Bureau records the population of incorporated and unincorporated communities. This information can be found on different locations within the U.S. Census Bureau website, depending on the location of the community. The tips below may help you verify the population of the rural or remote community that will benefit from the proposed clean energy project based on the name of that community:

- For incorporated communities located in the Continental United States, Hawai’i, Puerto Rico, or Alaska, look up the population using the name of the community directly:
  - Go to <https://data.census.gov/>.
  - In the search bar, enter the name of the city, town, or similar incorporated municipality and hit “Enter” to look up the total population.

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<sup>9</sup> This definition is adapted from the U.S. Census Bureau definition for Incorporated Place.

- For unincorporated communities located in the Continental United States, Hawai'i, Puerto Rico, or Alaska (check to see if your community is listed as a CDP using commonly known names):
  - Go to <https://data.census.gov/>.
  - In the search bar, enter the commonly known names of the unincorporated community
  - If a drop-down list appears, look for the name of the unincorporated community followed by "CDP" and the state. Click on this search result to look up the total population.
- For incorporated and unincorporated communities located on an island territory, please use the following island-specific pages to locate the appropriate data for incorporated or unincorporated places:
  - [American Samoa](#)
  - [Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands \(CNMI\)](#)
  - [Guam](#)
  - [U.S. Virgin Islands](#).

Note that the above methods require entry of the name of the incorporated or unincorporated place. If you do not have this information, it may be possible to search for it on <https://data.census.gov> by searching for a five-digit zip code or county name. This may pull up the name of a CDP directly, or it may link to a map on which you can look for relevant incorporated or unincorporated places.

Please note that while the 5-Digit Zip Code Tabulation Area (ZCTA5) and county may be useful for identifying the name of a relevant city, town, or unincorporated area, it will not be used to verify the 10,000 inhabitants requirement. DOE will perform this verification based on the name of the city, town, or unincorporated area provided in the HeroX platform, as described in Section 2.2.

