



Energizing Rural Communities Prize: Phase Two Official Rules

July 13, 2023



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: Phase Two 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.

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.¹

Through this prize, OCED seeks to support winners of Phase One with targeted support and the opportunity to compete for an additional Phase Two cash prize of \$200,000. Only winners of Phase One are eligible to compete in Phase Two.

In Phase Two, competitors are expected to leverage Phase One prize funding to implement their proposed plan. This implementation of their Phase One plan includes meeting identified milestones and metrics and measuring the impact and demonstrating the success of their activities and achieving their targeted outcomes. Competitors may incorporate lessons learned through the implementation of their activities and adjust their approach, metrics, and community engagement accordingly. Winning activities are designed to act as first steps toward a future clean energy project, but no construction is required as part of this prize.

This prize contains two individual tracks, PARTNER and FINANCE, each with two phases.

Track	PARTNER Track	FINANCE Track
<i>Phase One Prizes (closed)</i>	<i>55 cash prizes of \$100,000 each and in-kind mentorship services</i>	<i>12 cash prizes of \$100,000 each and in-kind mentorship services</i>
Phase Two Prizes	Up to 30 awards of \$200,000 each, selected based on plan implementation	Up to 10 awards of \$200,000 each, selected based on plan implementation

¹ 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>.



1.1 Key Dates

- **Phase One Winner Announcement and Awards:** July 13, 2023
- **Phase Two Opens:** July 13, 2023
 - **Confirmation of Community:** February 1, 2024, at 5 p.m. ET
- **Phase Two Closes:** July 12, 2024, at 5 p.m. ET
- **Phase Two Winner Announcement and Awards:** August 2024

All dates are subject to change.

1.2 Eligibility and Competitors

Phase Two is open only to winners of Phase One of the Energizing Rural Communities Prize. Competitors must submit under the track for which they were selected as a winner in Phase One.

All competitors must remain in compliance with the eligibility criteria in Appendix A. All submissions must continue to demonstrate that the project benefits at least one rural or remote area. The terms “rural or remote area,” “rural or remote community,” and “community” are used interchangeably throughout this document. These terms are defined as a community 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. Please see Appendix B for detailed information on identifying which communities qualify.

Competitors’ submissions that do not demonstrate benefits to a rural or remote area will be considered ineligible and removed from further evaluation. As in Phase One, eligibility of the primary beneficiary will be evaluated based on the nine-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. See Appendix B for additional information on what constitutes a rural or remote community in this prize.

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 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.

Additional information on the HeroX platform and submission process is provided in Sections 4 and 5, detailing the requirements for both tracks.

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. In addition to this prize, DOE has issued 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 implement 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 but are not limited to 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.

While we do not expect competitors to construct clean energy projects as part of this prize, competitors must take steps toward achieving the vision for a clean energy project in a rural or remote community that is supported by their proposed activities outlined in the Phase One submission.

In Phase Two, competitors will implement the proposed activities from Phase One to work toward these goals and the development of clean energy projects in rural or remote areas of the United States. Phase Two activities and targeted outcomes will vary by track, but examples are provided below. Competitors are not limited to these examples and are encouraged to implement activities and outcomes that will be most impactful in advancing the community's clean energy vision.

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. Teams are expected to build on the established and proposed partnerships outlined in the Phase One submission with clear steps toward implementing the identified clean energy projects. Engagement with the partnering organizations identified in the evidence of commitment will be considered in Phase Two evaluation.

Partnership activities pursued under this track should advance completion of a project. Competitors are encouraged to incorporate lessons learned along the way to ensure the activities are successful in providing benefits to the identified rural or remote area and should be communicated in the final submission materials.

Some example outcomes at the end of Phase Two that would be considered successful may include, but are not limited to:

- Preliminary engineering studies or designs.
- Renewable energy resource assessments.
- Utility analysis or offtake agreements.
- Project permitting.
- 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.

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. Teams are expected to implement their Phase One plan in their efforts to compete for a prize in Phase Two. Successful teams will take clear steps toward enabling rural or remote communities to access conventional financing for energy projects, create pathways for communities to pursue unconventional capital, connect finance partners that want to expand businesses to support clean energy projects for the benefit of rural or remote areas, or other creative ideas to improve 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.

In Phase Two, competitors will be evaluated on their progress toward reducing one or more barriers they identified in their Phase One submission 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 these barriers. Targeted outcomes should align with the identified outcome(s) in a competitor's Phase One submission. Some example outcomes at the end of Phase Two that would be considered successful may include, but are not limited to:

- 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 that results in utility bill savings.
- A financial institution partners with a nonprofit organization to qualify and finance clean energy projects in rural or remote communities.
- A project developer demonstrates the feasibility of a unique financing model for a clean energy project in a rural or remote community.
- A rural electric cooperative incorporates financial incentives, such as the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), to develop clean energy projects in rural or remote communities that reduce the cost of electricity for its members.
- A local or regional government successfully attracts clean energy investment into a rural or remote community within its jurisdiction.
- A utility creates a source of funds to finance local clean energy projects, such as sustained operation and maintenance or local workforce development.

Targeted outcomes must contribute to a long-term clean energy project in the community, either directly or by those who will receive access to capital through this mechanism.

3 Competitor Support Mechanisms

To better enable competitors to be successful in Phase Two, the Energizing Rural Communities Prize Administration team is providing access to a network of supporters for competing teams. The following mechanisms have been formalized for competitors to ensure they are able to develop a high-quality application or support the execution of their proposed activities from Phase One in Phase Two of the prize.

Some of these trainings may take place in person. Should competitors elect to attend these in-person events, they are expected to leverage the funds provided in Phase One.



3.1 Power Connectors

Power Connectors support all Phase One winning teams in the prize. The Power Connectors will provide direct support, webinars, training, and networking sessions for the benefit of all the teams. Competitors will be asked for their input on the types of support that will be the most relevant to them. Support provided in Phase Two will be shaped around needs of the competing teams.

Potential areas for support and training opportunities are identified in the following table, but this list is not intended to be comprehensive. A final list of these opportunities will be distributed during Phase Two.

Support Tasks	Detailed Execution
Regional Support	<p>In regions representative of the Phase One winners, Power Connectors will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with teams to identify existing regional/place-based entrepreneurship or innovation hubs supporting rural or remote areas and connect with teams. • Develop a map of the ecosystem of these regional/place-based entrepreneurship hubs. • Collaboratively expand training and onsite programming to meet the needs of the local winners, leveraging the hubs' existing expertise and programs combined with Power Connector energy-specific expertise and relationships.
Targeted Trainings	<p>In partnership with competitors, Power Connectors will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify training session topics that would be the most impactful for Phase One winners and the community or communities they are supporting. • Produce, amplify, and host information sessions, webinars, trainings, workshops, matchmaking events, career fairs, and/or internship/apprenticeship programs. • Host seminars featuring experts on topics such as clean energy development for nonprofits, best practices for developing a strategic energy plan, grant/proposal writing, community engagement, or other topics of interest.
Networking	<p>Directly in support of competitors, Power Connectors will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host quarterly peer-to-peer workshops where Phase One winners and other organizations focused on creating an inclusive energy ecosystem can discuss challenges and make connections with potential partners. • Host a public showcase and networking event featuring the Phase One winners, their projects, and any partnership opportunities.

Updates on training sessions, mentorship contacts, and office hours will be posted on the [HeroX platform](#) periodically, and competitors are encouraged to leverage these opportunities.

4 PARTNER Track: Submission Requirements and Review Process

4.1 How To Enter

Submissions to the Phase Two PARTNER Track are limited to Phase One PARTNER Track winners. Go to [HeroX](#) and follow the instructions to update your existing team profile, if necessary. Submit all required materials as the same team that initially registered and was selected as a winner in Phase One. Ensure all materials are uploaded before the deadline in the Key Dates Section 1.1 and as displayed on the [HeroX](#) website.



While teams are expected to be formed prior to Phase Two, competitors continue to have the ability to communicate with one another, ask questions of the prize administration team, and receive access to additional competitor support.

4.2 What To Submit

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

The following items are required for each submission:

Item	Will Be Made Public ²	Scored Item
Primary Beneficiary	Yes	No
Cover Page	Yes	No
Summary Slide	Yes	No
Recorded Presentation (10 minutes)	Yes	Yes
Partnership Packet	No	Yes

4.2.1 Unscored, Public-Facing Submission Materials

4.2.1.1 Primary Beneficiary

An eligibility criterion is that prize activities must benefit a rural or remote area. In Phase One, competitors submitted the Location of Primary Benefits on both the submission form and Cover Page.

On **February 1, 2024**, competitors must re-submit the Location of Primary Benefits (nine-digit zip code and name of city, town, or unincorporated area [Census Designated Place]) on HeroX. This community must meet the definition of a rural or remote area³ to maintain eligibility. Submissions that do not satisfy this requirement will be considered ineligible and removed from further evaluation.

During the final submission of materials on **July 12, 2024**, commitment letters will be required to verify engagement with the Location of Primary Benefits. The Location of Primary Benefits submitted on February 1, 2024, must match the submission on July 12, 2024. Submissions that do not satisfy this requirement will be considered ineligible and removed from further evaluation.

4.2.1.2 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, nine-digit zip code).

² Competitors who do not want 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).

³ These terms are defined as a community 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. Please see Appendix B for detailed information on identifying which communities qualify.

- Location of Primary Benefits. This is the rural or remote area⁴ that benefits from the proposed plan (nine-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 has benefitted a verified rural or remote area. This information must be submitted and verified on February 1, 2024, and included in the final submission on July 12, 2024. If the submission does not benefit a rural or remote area, it will be determined ineligible and will not be reviewed.**
- Short description of activities pursued in Phase Two.
- Project members (names and high-level backgrounds of team members).
- Other partners (if any).

4.2.1.3 Summary Slide

Make a public-facing, one-slide submission summary that introduces the competitor and mission. Indicate how you have built upon or progressed from the initial submission in Phase One. 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 Submission Items

The scored items in the Phase Two submission package are a pre-recorded presentation, up to 10 minutes in length, and the partnership packet.

Scored materials will be evaluated on how well they address scoring statements in the respective criterion; each statement (described below) will be scored from 0 to 5, as shown here.

0	1	2	3	4	5
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	Total Possible Points
Pre-Recorded Presentation	4	20
Partnership Packet	12	60
Criterion 1: Partnership Activities Pursued During Phase Two of the Prize	4	20
Criterion 2: Outcomes, Impacts, and Success Metrics	5	25

⁴ 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.

Criterion 3: Strategy for Achieving Community Energy Goals After Completion of the Prize	3	15
Reviewer Recommendation	1	15
TOTAL	17	95

4.2.2.1 Pre-Recorded Presentation

At the end of Phase Two, competitors will present their activities and impacts. Each team is expected to develop a pre-recorded presentation, up to 10 minutes in length. Teams can expect the same reviewers to review their pre-recorded presentation and partnership packets.

The pre-recorded presentation may be leveraged in future outreach activities and as a representation of the outcomes that have been achieved in the prize overall, so competitors are encouraged to focus on the professionalism and polish of the video.

The presentation will be scored against the statements in the following table.

Scoring Criteria: Pre-Recorded Presentation	
<p>Suggested Content Competitor Provides</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A description of how the competitor has achieved positive impacts and provided benefits to a rural or remote community . • A high-level description of the targeted partnership(s) the competitor developed or improved upon during the activities undertaken in Phase Two. • A description of how these partnership(s) better prepared the community for future clean energy projects. • An explanation of how the activities undertaken helped to achieve one or more goals of the prize stated in Section 2.2 of this document. 	<p>Each Statement Scored on a 0–5 Scale</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through the activities undertaken and the partnership(s) that the competitor has built or leveraged, the competitor has clearly demonstrated positive impacts on the rural or remote community designated as the primary beneficiary. • The activities undertaken and the partnership(s) that the competitor has built or leveraged in Phase Two are likely to better prepare the rural or remote community that directly benefited from this project for future clean energy projects. • The competitor has demonstrated that the activities undertaken in Phase Two directly contributed to one or more of the prize goals stated in Section 2.2 of this document. • The competitor’s final presentation was an accurate, engaging, and effective depiction of the program that clearly communicated its innovativeness.

4.2.2.2 Partnership Packet

Write a detailed partnership packet in a narrative format. [A template is available](#) to use in drafting the partnership packet. The partnership packet should address the Prize Goals in Section 2.2 and be guided by the scoring criteria in the following tables.

The total word count of the partnership packet cannot exceed **5,000** words. This packet may include up to **five** supporting visualizations or graphics.

As part of the partnership packet, competitors must submit evidence of commitment (e.g., letters of commitment, contracts, memoranda of understanding) from community leadership to verify engagement with the Location of Primary Benefits. This evidence does not contribute to the word or visualization limit in the partnership packet.

The Location of Primary Benefits submitted on February 1, 2024, must match the submission on July 12, 2024. Submissions that do not satisfy this requirement will be considered ineligible and removed from further evaluation.

Competitors should assume that the reviewers in Phase Two are not the same as those in Phase One when considering what materials to include in the partnership packet. 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 Packet

Three criteria must be addressed in the partnership packet:

- **Criterion 1:** Partnership Activities Pursued During Phase Two of the Prize.
- **Criterion 2:** Outcomes, Impacts, and Success Metrics.
- **Criterion 3:** 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 right-hand column contains the scored statements that the reviewers will be using for each of the three criteria. The left-hand 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: Partnership Activities Pursued During Phase Two of the Prize	
Suggested Content Competitor Provides	Each Statement Scored on a 0–5 Scale
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● A description of what occurred during Phase Two including a detailed description of the activities, achievements, deliverables, and milestones and how these map to the proposal in Phase One.● A description of project partners and their roles in undertaking the activities. What partner organizations were involved? Was any DOE-provided assistance used (e.g., technical assistance, Power Connectors)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● The competitor clearly explains what activities were undertaken during Phase Two and how closely this aligned with the original plan. Where it differs, the competitor explains why.● The competitor provides a clear description of the role of project partners and how each contributed to the activity's success.● The competitor demonstrates community support for the activity and/or a description for how the community was



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An overview of a community engagement strategy the team pursued to successfully implement the project plan and garner community buy-in. • A description of the challenges encountered during Phase Two and how these were overcome. 	<p>engaged in the implementation of the activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The competitor provides a comprehensive description of the challenges they encountered and how they were overcome.
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Criterion 2: Outcomes, Impacts, and Success Metrics

Suggested Content Competitor Provides	Each Statement Scored on a 0–5 Scale
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A description of strategies and methods the competitor used to build trust and strengthen relationships and partnerships with and within rural or remote communities, particularly overburdened and underserved communities, as indicated by DOE's Energy Justice Dashboard, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) EJScreen, the Council on Environmental Quality's Climate and Economic Justice Screen Tool, or another explanation. • A description of activities the competitor has carried out that leveraged newly developed or existing partnerships to facilitate clean energy projects in rural or remote communities. Partnerships should have effectively connected communities to engineering services or other resources to support clean energy projects, and/or aggregate similar energy projects in multiple rural or remote communities. • Evidence of commitment from partner organization(s), such as letters of commitment, memoranda of understanding, contracts, and/or funding agreements. This evidence does not contribute to the word or visualization limit in the partnership packet. • A description of how activities increased access to funding for rural or remote communities. • A description of credible methods and metrics the competitor used to evaluate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The competitor's activities effectively built trust and strengthened relationships and partnerships that benefited rural or remote communities, particularly overburdened and underserved rural or remote communities. • The competitor's activities pursued during Phase Two resulted in improved partnerships that support the advancement of a clean energy project that benefits a rural or remote community, and the competitor has submitted evidence that demonstrates the effect of these improved partnerships. • The competitor's activities resulted in increased access to federal, state, or local government or private funding for rural or remote communities. • The competitor provided a thorough discussion of the original Phase One goals that were met, those that were not met, and lessons learned that can be incorporated into future activities. • The competitor has submitted evidence of commitment that demonstrates successful execution of activities with partnering organization(s).



the achievement of activities pursued during Phase Two, such as through Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound (SMART) goals.	
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Criterion 3: Strategy for Achieving Community Energy Goals After Completion of the Prize	
<p>Suggested Content Competitor Provides</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A description of how the activities undertaken helped create or advance the community’s energy improvement goals and/or a specific clean energy project. • A description of how the long-term vision and goals of the clean energy project evolved as a result of the prize. • A description of how the activities, including partnership building, project development, and/or community engagement, could be replicated in other rural or remote communities. • A description of how the activities undertaken helped overcome systemic barriers to energy improvements in rural or remote communities. • A description of how the team is ensuring this project will continue, including any additional funding sources that will support the sustainability of the project. 	<p>Each Statement Scored on a 0–5 Scale</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The competitor has described how the activities undertaken during Phase Two have advanced the community’s goals for energy improvement (relating to resilience, safety, reliability, availability, and reduction of adverse environmental impacts from energy generation) and/or a specific clean energy project. • The competitor’s plan resulted in a replicable model to improve partnerships in other rural or remote communities, particularly by demonstrating partnership methods that overcome systemic barriers to energy improvements in rural or remote communities. • The competitor has a reasonable and achievable plan for ensuring the project continues after the conclusion of Phase Two, including additional funding sources outside of the Energizing Rural Communities Prize.

Reviewer Recommendation	
There is no direct corresponding submission requirement for this score. Rather, it is an overall assessment of all submitted materials, including supporting documentation.	<p>Each Statement Scored as a 0 or 15</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The competitor’s activities demonstrate a strong likelihood that a clean energy project will be developed. This submission is recommended for an award.

4.3 How We Determine and Award Winners

The Prize Administrator screens all completed submissions and ensures competitors maintain eligibility. 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 both the competitor's submitted partnership packet and presentation to ensure familiarity with the project according to the evaluation criteria described in Section 4.

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 right-hand side of the tables in Sections 4.2.2.1 and 4.2.2.2.
- Reviewers will score each statement from 0 to 5, 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 95 points, as described in the table in Section 4.2.2.
- 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.

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

A federal employee in OCED will act as the judge and make the final determination of winners. 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 prize 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.

5 FINANCE Track: Submission Requirements and Review Process

5.1 How To Enter

Submissions to the Phase Two FINANCE Track are limited to Phase One FINANCE Track winners. Go to [HeroX](#) and follow the instructions to update your existing team profile, if necessary. Submit all required materials as the same team that initially registered and was selected as a winner in Phase One. Ensure



all materials are uploaded before the deadline in the Key Dates Section 1.1 and as displayed on the [HeroX](#) website.

While teams are expected to be formed prior to Phase Two, competitors continue to have the ability to communicate with one another, ask questions of the prize administration team, and receive access to additional competitor support.

5.2 What To Submit

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

The following items are required for each submission:

Item	Will Be Made Public ⁵	Scored Item
Primary Beneficiary	Yes	No
Cover Page	Yes	No
Summary Slide	Yes	No
Recorded Presentation (10 minutes)	Yes	Yes
Project Packet	No	Yes

5.2.1 Unscored, Public-Facing Submission Materials

5.2.1.1 Primary Beneficiary

An eligibility criterion is that prize activities must benefit a rural or remote area. In Phase One, competitors submitted the Location of Primary Benefits on both the submission form and in the Cover Page.

On **February 1, 2024**, competitors must re-submit the Location of Primary Benefits (nine-digit zip code and name of city, town, or unincorporated area [Census Designated Place]) on HeroX. This community must meet the definition of a rural or remote area⁶ to maintain eligibility. Submissions that do not satisfy this requirement will be considered ineligible and removed from further evaluation.

During the final submission of materials on **July 12, 2024**, commitment letters will be required to verify engagement with the Location of Primary Benefits. The Location of Primary Benefits submitted on February 1, 2024, must match the submission on July 12, 2024. Submissions that do not satisfy this requirement will be considered ineligible and removed from further evaluation.

5.2.1.2 Cover Page

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

- Title.

⁵ Competitors who do not want 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).

⁶ These terms are defined as a community 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. Please see Appendix B for detailed information on identifying which communities qualify.

- Competitor name.
- Organization (name, contact information, web link, nine-digit zip code).
- Location of Primary Benefits. This is the rural or remote area⁷ that benefits from the proposed plan (nine-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 has benefitted a verified rural or remote area. If this information is not submitted and verified on February 1, 2024, and July 12, 2024, the submission will be determined ineligible and will not be reviewed.**
- Short description of activities pursued in Phase Two.
- Project members (names and high-level backgrounds of team members).
- Other partners (if any).

5.2.1.3 Summary Slide

Make a public-facing, one-slide submission summary that introduces the competitor and mission. Indicate how you have built upon or progressed from the initial submission in Phase One. 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.

5.2.2 Scored Submission Items

The scored items in the Phase Two submission package are a pre-recorded presentation, up to 10 minutes in length, and the project packet.

Scored materials will be evaluated on how well they address scoring statements in the respective criterion; each statement (described below) will be scored from 0 to 5, as shown here.

0	1	2	3	4	5
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	Total Possible Points
Pre-Recorded Presentation	5	25
Project Packet	11	55
Criterion 1: Activities Pursued During Phase Two of the Prize	4	20
Criterion 2: Outcomes, Impacts, and Success Metrics	3	15

⁷ 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.

Criterion 3: Strategy for Achieving Community Energy Goals After Completion of the Prize	4	20
Reviewer Recommendation	1	15
TOTAL	17	95

5.2.2.1 Pre-Recorded Presentation

At the end of Phase Two, competitors will present their activities and impacts. Each team is expected to develop a pre-recorded presentation, up to 10 minutes in length. Teams can expect the same reviewers to review their pre-recorded presentation and their partnership packets, and as such can create them as complementary to one another.

Competitors should be creative and convey their information in a fun and engaging way but not expend time on labor-intensive activities that only improve production quality (e.g., technical elements, such as décor, lighting, and cinematic techniques). Reviewers will focus on the content, not the quality, of the video production.

The presentation will be scored against the statements in the following table.

Scoring Criteria: Pre-Recorded Presentation	
<p>Suggested Content Competitor Provides</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A description of how the competitor has engaged with the community that primarily benefited from the activities undertaken in Phase Two. • A high-level description of the project and impact it had within the community or communities. • A description of the team’s experience implementing, as a part of the activities undertaken during Phase Two, financial and technical support to low- and moderate-income households and businesses that serve these households. • Description of resources and capabilities developed during Phase Two that helped the team successfully execute on the project plan. 	<p>Each Statement Scored on a 0–5 Scale</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through the activities undertaken, the competitor has clearly demonstrated positive impacts on the rural or remote community, designated as the primary beneficiary. • The team has demonstrated positive outcomes through the financial and technical support provided to low- and moderate-income households or businesses that serve these households. • The activity the team implemented is valuable, impactful, and contributed to (or will contribute to) clean energy projects within a rural or remote community, directly or indirectly. • The competitor has demonstrated that the activities undertaken in Phase Two directly contributed to one or more of the prize goals stated in Section 2.2 of this document. • The competitor’s final presentation was an accurate, engaging, and effective depiction of the program that clearly communicated its innovativeness.



5.2.2.2 Project Packet

Write a detailed project packet in a narrative format. [A template is available](#) to use in drafting the project packet. The project packet should address the Prize Goals in Section 2.2 and be guided by the scoring criteria that follows.

The total word count of the project packet cannot exceed **5,000** words. This packet may include up to **five** supporting visualizations or graphics.

As part of the project packet, competitors must submit evidence of commitment (e.g., letters of commitment, contracts, memoranda of understanding) from community leadership to verify engagement with the Location of Primary Benefits. This evidence does not contribute to the word or visualization limit in the project packet.

The Location of Primary Benefits submitted on February 1, 2024, must match the submission on July 12, 2024. Submissions that do not satisfy this requirement will be considered ineligible and removed from further evaluation.

Competitors should assume that the reviewers in Phase Two are not the same as those in Phase One when considering what materials to include in the partnership packet. 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 Packet

Three criteria must be addressed in the project packet:

- **Criterion 1:** Activities Pursued During Phase Two of the Prize.
- **Criterion 2:** Outcomes, Impacts, and Success Metrics.
- **Criterion 3:** Strategy for Future Funding After the Completion of the Prize.

The following tables describe the content that the competitor should provide in the submission to successfully address each criterion. The right-hand column contains the scored statements that the reviewers will be using for each of the three criteria. The left-hand 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: Activities Pursued During Phase Two of the Prize	
Suggested Content Competitor Provides	Each Statement Scored on a 0–5 Scale
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● A description of what occurred during Phase Two including a detailed description of the activities, achievements, and milestones and how these map to the proposal in Phase One.● A description of project partners and their roles in undertaking the activities. What partner organizations were involved? Was any DOE-provided assistance used (e.g., technical assistance, Power Connectors)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● The competitor clearly explains what activities were undertaken during Phase Two and how closely this aligned with the original plan. Where it differs, the competitor explains why.● The competitor provides a clear description of the role of project partners and how each contributed to the activity's success.● The competitor demonstrates community support for the activity and/or a

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An overview of a community engagement strategy the team pursued to successfully implement the project plan and garner community buy-in. • A description of the challenges encountered during Phase Two and how these were overcome. 	<p>description for how the community was engaged in the implementation of the activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The competitor provides a comprehensive description of the challenges they encountered and how they were overcome.
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Criterion 2: Outcomes, Impacts, and Success Metrics

<p>Suggested Content Competitor Provides</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A description of how the project addressed financing barriers for clean energy and resulted in (or will result in) increased access to capital in the targeted rural and remote communities. • A description of strategies and methods the competitor used to build trust and strengthen relationships and partnerships with and within rural or remote communities, particularly overburdened and underserved communities, as indicated by DOE's Energy Justice Dashboard, EPA's EJScreen, the Council on Environmental Quality's Climate and Economic Justice Screen Tool, or another explanation. • A description of how the competitor met the goals listed in the Phase One project plan. If any of these goals were not met, identify lessons learned as a result that can inform and be incorporated into future activities. Would you consider the project a success and what metrics are you using to make that determination? 	<p>Each Statement Scored on a 0–5 Scale</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of the competitor's project plan resulted in (or will result in) greater access to capital for clean energy projects in the targeted rural and remote communities. • The competitor clearly describes how their activities have benefited overburdened and underserved populations. • The competitor provided a thorough discussion of the original Phase One goals that were met, those that were not met, and lessons learned that can be incorporated into future activities.
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Criterion 3: Strategy for Future Funding After the Completion of the Prize

<p>Suggested Content Competitor Provides</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A description of the proposed strategy to ensure project sustainability within the selected community after completion of Phase Two of this prize. 	<p>Each Statement Scored on a 0–5 Scale</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The implemented plan includes a well thought out strategy to ensure sustainability after completion of Phase Two of this prize. • The implemented plan can be replicated to other rural or remote communities.
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A description of how the proposed plan is replicable in other rural or remote communities. • A description of the proposed funding sources that have been obtained or are being pursued to ensure the success of the program after completion of the prize. • A description of the continued impacts this project could have after completion of the prize. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The competitor has secured alternative funding sources or is actively pursuing such funding to maintain and expand the program. • The expected results from the continuation of the program after completion of the prize are achievable and impactful.
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Reviewer Recommendation	
<p>There is no direct corresponding submission requirement for this score. Rather, it is an overall assessment of all submitted materials, including supporting documentation.</p>	<p>Each Statement Scored as a 0 or 15</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The competitor’s activities demonstrate a strong likelihood that improved access to capital will lead to the development of at least one clean energy project. This submission is recommended for an award.

5.3 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 project plans and pre-recorded presentations to ensure familiarity with the project according to the evaluation criteria described in Section 5.2.

5.3.1 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 right-hand side of the tables in Sections 5.2.2.1 and 5.2.2.2.
- Reviewers will score each statement from 0 to 5, 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 5.2.2.
- Each statement score will be added together to generate a total score for the submission, which can be up to 90 points, as described in the table in Section 5.2.2, 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.



5.3.2 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.

5.3.3 Final Determination

A federal employee in OCED will act as the judge and make the final determination of winners. Final determination of the winners is based on the reviewers' feedback and scores, application of program policy factors, and the interview findings (if applicable).

5.3.4 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.

5.4 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 July 12, 2024, 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 program⁸ 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 risk⁹ 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 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.

⁸ 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.

⁹ Currently, the list of countries of risk includes Russia, Iran, North Korea, and China.



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 CDP¹⁰.

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, Hawaii, 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.

¹⁰ This definition is adapted from the U.S. Census Bureau definition for Incorporated Place.

- For unincorporated communities located in the continental United States, Hawaii, 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.

