

# UTILITY-LED GRID RESILIENCE PROJECTS FOR RI'S PROMOTING RESILIENCE AND OUTAGE PREVENTION (PROP) PROGRAM

Rhode Island Subawards from Section 40101(d) Formula Grants to States and Tribes – Preventing Outages and Enhancing the Resilience of the Electric Grid

Issued June 2024

## I. Opportunity Summary

The Rhode Island Office of Energy Resources (OER) is a state agency dedicated to the mission of leading Rhode Island to a clean, reliable, affordable, and equitable energy future. **OER is seeking proposals for grid resilience projects from utilities servicing the State of Rhode Island that will help to prevent outages and enhance the resilience of the electric grid.** The funding aims to enhance grid resilience, prevent outages, and mitigate the impact of disruptive events through eligible investments in activities, technologies, equipment, and other hardening measures. Given the vertically integrated nature of local grid infrastructure, this funding opportunity is available to all utilities servicing Rhode Island to undertake resilience projects that will provide the greatest community benefit to their service area.

This formula funding opportunity was enabled under section 40101(d) of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), also known as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA).<sup>1</sup> IIJA is a once-in-a-generation investment in infrastructure that will grow a more sustainable, resilient, and equitable economy by driving the creation of good-paying union jobs and ensuring stronger access to economic and environmental benefits for disadvantaged communities (DACs). As part of and in addition to upgrading and modernizing infrastructure, DOE's BIL investments will address the climate crisis and support efforts to build a clean and equitable energy economy that achieves zero carbon electricity by 2033 and put the United States on a path to achieve net-zero emissions economy-wide by no later than 2050.

The formula funding awarded to RI OER as the primary eligible recipient of funds through 40101(d) will support the Administration and Congressional goals to

- (1) demonstrate measurable improvements in energy resilience in the United States and mitigate climate-related risk,
- (2) invest in modernized grid infrastructure that can enable consumer access to lower-cost energy and accommodate increased electrification, increased penetrations of variable renewable electricity and distributed energy resources, and other evolving system needs over the coming decades,
- (3) invest in clean energy and decarbonization solutions to achieve a carbon-free power sector by 2033 and net-zero greenhouse gas emissions economy-wide by 2050, and
- (4) create good-paying jobs with the free and fair choice to join a union.

## II. Statutory Program Requirements

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.energy.gov/gdo/bipartisan-infrastructure-law>

**Small Utilities Set Aside:** Section 40101(d)(6) requires a Small Utilities Set Aside, by which the percentage of funding made available to entities that sell not more than 4,000,000 MWh per year is not less than the percentage of all customers in Rhode Island that are served by those eligible entities. Additionally, Rhode Island has committed to ensuring the benefits of the funding are shared equitably, advancing the State’s equity, environmental, and energy justice priorities, and in line with the Administration’s Justice40 Initiative.

**Cost Match Requirements:** The statutory cost match requirements mandated in 40101(d) states that eligible entities that sell greater than 4,000,000 MWh of electricity per year must match *100% of the subaward value*. Small utilities that sell  $\leq 4,000,000$  MWh of electricity per year must match *one-third (1/3) of the subaward value*.

**Program Period:** OER's approved application to the DOE included a Program Narrative intended to apply to each year of the five (5) year award period. Awards may be extended to span the amount of time necessary for recipients to complete all subaward project efforts, for up to ten (10) years.

**Utility Selection:** All utilities may be awarded, quality of project proposal and number of proposals received will dictate final award amount. Utilities may apply for up to TWO projects, but the project with the highest score will be awarded given the availability of federal funds. **Project proposals submitted to the RI PROP funding opportunity CANNOT be duplicative of projects submitted to the Grid Resilience and Innovation Partnerships (GRIP) Program through DOE.** 40101(d) cannot support any project proposals that has been approved for funding under GRIP.

2

**Greatest Community Benefit:** IIJA Section 40101(d)(5) requires States and Indian Tribes to give priority to projects that, “in the determination of the State or Indian Tribe, will generate the greatest community benefit (whether rural or urban) in reducing the likelihood and consequences of disruptive events.” To foster equitable implementation of IIJA, priority shall be given to project proposals that utilize community benefits plans to engage communities and the labor force while advancing investments in DEI. Project labor agreements may be explored on a case-by-case basis. Community benefits plans are intentionally flexible to generate the best approaches from applicants and their partners. RI OER is committed to working with future sub awardees to develop community benefits plans for proposed projects.

**Federal Flow Down Requirements:** OER must apply the terms and conditions of the 40101(d) Award, as applicable, including the provisions regarding intellectual property rights (per 201 CFR 200.315 or 2 CFR 910.362, as applicable), to all subrecipients (and subcontractors, as appropriate), as required by 2 CFR 200.101, and to require their strict compliance therewith. Further, OER must apply the Award terms as required by 2 CFR 200.327 to all subrecipients (and subcontractors, as appropriate), and to require their strict compliance therewith. Awards under this federal funding opportunity will have requirements including, without limitation, the Buy America Requirement, subchapter IV of chapter 31 of title 40, United States Code commonly referred to as the “Davis-Bacon Act” (DBA), Executive Order 11246 Affirmative Action and Pay Transparency Requirements, and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements.

### III. Program Roles and Responsibilities



Chart 1 below outlines the roles of different parties participating in the RI PROP program. Project proposals may also be subject to review by a technical and financial feasibility consultant solicited by OER. The technical consultant is included as part of OER’s program administration team and will aid in review of the technical and financial feasibility of proposed projects through this funding opportunity.

Chart 1: Outline of anticipated roles of the different Program participants.

	<b>OER</b>	<b>Utility</b>	<b>Technical Consultant</b>
<b>Procurement</b>	Release RFA to utilities and determine if applications meet threshold requirements; select utility subrecipients	Submit application to OER in response to the RFA	Will Aid in Review of submitted project applications to determine project feasibility and financial appropriateness of proposals
<b>Community Benefits Plans</b>	Review Community Benefits Plans and assist with implementation	Priority is given to projects that utilize community benefits plans	Assist with development of Community Benefits Plans
<b>External Communication</b>	Stakeholder emails; implementation of community benefits plan (if any)	Stakeholder engagement: public meetings and emails	TBD
<b>Program Administration</b>	Facilitate quarterly check-in calls	Participate in quarterly check-in calls, provide OER with data necessary for reporting to DOE.	Participate in check-in calls; Help utilities with marketing (if applicable); Holding public meetings (if applicable);

3

It is expected that the primary points of contact for selected subrecipients, and OER will participate in quarterly check-in calls. At program kick off, all parties will work to find a date and time for this call. Utilities may request more frequent meetings during the first few weeks of the program.

**IV. Scope of Work**



The objective of this Program is to improve the resilience of the electric grid against disruptive events. Per IJIA section 40101(a)(1), a disruptive event is “an event in which operations of the electric grid are disrupted, preventively shut off, or cannot operate safely due to extreme weather, wildfire, or a natural disaster.” To achieve this objective, **funding provided by DOE may be used to implement a wide range of resilience measures intended to mitigate the impact of disruptive events, including:**

- a. weatherization technologies and equipment;
- b. fire-resistant technologies and fire prevention systems;
- c. monitoring and control technologies;
- d. the undergrounding of electrical equipment;
- e. utility pole management;
- f. the relocation of power lines or the reconductoring of power lines with low-sag, advanced conductors;
- g. vegetation and fuel-load management;
- h. the use or construction of energy storage for enhancing the grid’s adaptive capacity during disruptive events, including microgrids and battery storage subcomponents

**Ineligible Projects:**

A subaward to an eligible entity under this grant program may not be used for:

4

- **Construction of a new electric generating facility**
- **Large-scale battery-storage facility that is not used for enhancing system adaptive capacity during disruptive events.**
  - System adaptive capacity is defined by DOE/NETL as the ability of the electrical grid to continue to supply electricity where needed during disruptive events. A range of distributed energy resources, including energy storage devices (e.g., batteries) and microgrids, can be used to provide electrical energy during disruptions and, therefore, provide system adaptive capacity."; **or**
- **Cybersecurity.**

**V. Evaluation Criteria**

All applications must meet the RI PROP Program objectives and must be responsive to the relevant scope of work and application requirements outlined above. Applications will be evaluated the below criteria. Each category and its associated weight (%) include:

- Community Benefits Criteria (50%)
- Resilience Impact Criteria (30%)
- Project Feasibility & Implementation (20%)

**Community Benefits Criteria (50%)**

1. Demonstrate a plan for meaningful collaboration with communities, including disadvantaged communities (DACs) when developing and implementing the project.



2. Demonstrate benefits from the project to communities and underserved populations, including EJ communities and DACs.
  - Priority must be given to projects that will “generate the greatest community benefit (whether rural or urban) in reducing the likelihood and consequences of disruptive events.” Preference will be given to projects that benefit Disadvantaged Communities (“DACs”) as defined by DOE’s Justice40 Initiative. DACs are formally identified using the Climate & Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST).<sup>2</sup>

### Resilience Impact Criteria (30%)

3. Reduce energy burden for customers with low-income electricity rates, DACs, or if no DACs are present in the service area, those facing the highest energy burden.
4. Demonstrate how the proposed project will ensure continuity of critical services during major event-related outages, especially services to underserved populations, including EJ communities and DACs.
5. **Demonstration of innovative concepts:** additional consideration will be given to applications that can provide innovative resilience solutions in their utility territory.

### Project Feasibility & Implementation (20%)

5

6. Demonstrate how the project will use strong labor standards and protections (including for direct employees, contractors, and sub-contractors), such as through the use of project labor agreements, and outline of a plan to attract, train, and retain an appropriately skilled workforce (i.e., through registered apprenticeships and other joint labor-management programs that serve all workers, particularly those underrepresented or historically excluded); and the use of an appropriately credentialed workforce (i.e., requirements for appropriate and relevant professional training, certification, and licensure).
7. Provide metrics that will accompany the objectives to measure outcomes associated with improving resilience, creating good-paying jobs with the free and fair choice to join a union, and advancing energy justice; and/or demonstrate how the project will support Rhode Island’s clean energy and decarbonization goals as defined in the Act on Climate.
8. Demonstrate experience of the utility with prior resilience projects, including the number of resilience projects completed in the applicable service area. Pricing and installation practices should also be outlined in this section

## VI. Reporting

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<sup>2</sup> CEJST uses an interactive map and uses datasets that are indicators of burdens in eight categories: climate change, energy, health, housing, legacy pollution, transportation, water and wastewater, and workforce development. The tool uses this information to identify communities that are experiencing these burdens. These are the communities that are disadvantaged because they are overburdened and underserved. <https://screeningtool.geoplatform.gov/en/#3/33.47/-97.5>



To comply with federal reporting requirements, all subrecipients of funds must share reporting data with OER as requested by DOE and NETL through a Quarterly Progress Report (QPR). OER is open to executing a non-disclosure agreement with any subrecipients if necessary. QPRs are due quarterly (due on January 30, April 30, July 30 and October 30) regardless of project status.

QPR reporting templates will be made available on the RI PROP website here:  
<https://energy.ri.gov/renewable-energy/energy-resilience/ri-promoting-resilient-outage-prevention-prop-program>

The Annual Metrics Report can be found on NETL's Post Award Documents website:  
<https://netl.doe.gov/bilhub/grid-resilience/formula-grants/post-award-documents>

GDO has also prepared Guidance for Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Grid Resilience Formula Grant Metrics: <https://netl.doe.gov/sites/default/files/2023-08/Guidance-for-Bipartisan-Infrastructure-Law-Grid-Resilience-Formula-Grant-Metrics-Tracking.pdf>

**Project impact is measured via resilience and reliability impact metrics, such as:**

- Reduction in the frequency of power outages.
- Reduction in the time it takes for customers to have power restored when outages occur.
- Number of customers directly benefiting from the investment project.
- Number and type of community(s) benefiting from an investment in critical grid infrastructure.
- Reduction in the average energy burden (for communities above 6 percent).
- Magnitude of infrastructure improvement for poor and failing systems. Poor and failing systems may be segments of the grid that are performing well below the mean in terms of CAIDI, SAIDI, SAIFI, or other important measures of reliability and resiliency.
- Number of newly trained or reskilled workers capable of implementing grid resilience projects.
- Number of grid resilience-related businesses that develop the capacity to install, operate, and/or maintain grid resilience projects and are qualified in any of the categories recognized by the Small Business Administration.
- Availability of emergency backup power to those affected by an outage (for example, a community hub, mobile generators)
- Improved communication between utility, local government, and residents, especially on safety and access to community resources
- Improved Outage Mapping & Data (including greater granularity and temporality) and that allows for greater customer understanding.

6

## VII. Application Format

This section outlines the content and format requirements for all Applications.

### 1. Project Name and location



2. **Project Narrative:** Provide a plan for implementation, describing the proposing utility’s ability to timely and successfully implement the project, including reporting requirements.
3. **Grant Amount Requested and estimated total project cost**
4. **Other Sources Of Funding Leveraged** (if applicable)
5. **Community Benefits Plan:** Please provide a robust description of how the proposed project will prioritize benefits to disadvantaged communities, how the proposed project will elicit the greatest community benefit to the utility service area, how the project will use strong labor standards and protections (including for direct employees, contractors, and sub-contractors), such as through the use of project labor agreements, and outline of a plan to attract, train, and retain an appropriately skilled workforce. To learn more about the US Department of Energy’s community benefits plans guidelines, please visit <https://www.energy.gov/infrastructure/about-community-benefits-plans>
6. **Service Area Benefitted:** Describe what communities in the service area will benefit from the resilience project, and identify if that service area is home to DACs or underserved communities
7. **Project Timeline:** Provide an expected timeline for implementation of the project, including project milestones. Please include anticipated month and year for each milestone.

**Applications must be emailed to Abigail Hasenfus at [Abigail.hasenfus@energy.ri.gov](mailto:Abigail.hasenfus@energy.ri.gov).** Due to file size limits on the OER email server, please make sure that files sizes are less than 10MB. Any changes to this date or the timeline will be updated on the RI PROP website. All email submissions should include “PROP Application Submission” in the subject line.

7

**VIII. Timeline**

- a. **This program has a rolling deadline. Applications will be reviewed and scored with funding made available on a first come, first serve basis.**
- b. The Utility must be available to meet with the application review team if an interview is determined to be necessary. At least one representative from the utility must attend.
- c. The application must be delivered via electronic format. All email submissions should include “RI PROP RFA” in the subject line.

**Questions and Contact Information**

Questions regarding this RFA should be submitted via email to [Abigail.Hasenfus@energy.ri.gov](mailto:Abigail.Hasenfus@energy.ri.gov). Information regarding this funding opportunity can be found on the Grid Resilience page of the OER website: <https://energy.ri.gov/renewable-energy/energy-resilience/ri-promoting-resilient-outage-prevention-prop-program>

**Disclaimer**

This RFA does not commit OER to award any funds, pay any costs incurred in preparing an application, or procure or contract for services or supplies. OER reserves the right to accept or reject any or all applications received, negotiate with all qualified applicants, cancel or modify the RFA in part or in its entirety, or change the application guidelines, when it is in its best interests. OER reserves the right to continue negotiations with the selected utility until the parties reach a mutual agreement. OER reserves the right to reject any or all responses; waive defects or irregularities in any response; enter into discussions with selected bidders; discontinue discussions with any bidder at any time and for any reason; correct inaccurate submissions; change the timing or sequence of activities related to this program; modify, suspend or cancel this program.

