

Renewable Energy Siting through Technical Engagement and Planning (R-STEP)

Submission Guidance

Background/Context

Large-scale renewable energy projects, especially wind and solar energy facilities and battery energy storage systems, have a pivotal role in decarbonizing the grid. Where and how large-scale renewable energy facilities are sited is a complex process that requires careful consideration of many interests, especially those of the communities hosting the facilities. State, local, and Tribal governments have important roles in evaluating and proactively planning for clean energy opportunities on private land. These governments may have limited resources and expertise to address the technical issues and community concerns that arise during the siting and permitting process. Meanwhile, siting challenges are unique to each facility, state, and host community; therefore, solutions need to be grounded in the priorities, policies, and interests of states and host communities.

[The Renewable Energy Siting through Technical Engagement and Planning \(R-STEP\)](#) program seeks to expand the decision-making capacity and expertise of state and local governments around large-scale renewable energy planning, siting, and permitting. This effort will facilitate renewable energy deployment while enabling communities to meaningfully participate in the siting process. Through funding, technical assistance (TA), and peer-to-peer information sharing, the program will enhance the decision-making capacity and expertise of state and local governments by supporting the development or expansion of state programs or initiatives that serve as a resource to their local communities.

Applications Requested for R-STEP Assessment Event

Through this R-STEP Assessment Event, the Department of Energy (DOE)'s Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE) is requesting applications from state-based collaboratives (collaboratives) aiming to expand state and local capacity for large-scale renewable energy planning and siting. Applicants can request up to \$2 million to execute proposed activities over the course of up to 3 years (36 months). Applications should 1) focus on plans to establish or expand a state-level initiative that improves decision-making by state, local, and/or Tribal governments on large-scale renewable energy planning, siting, and permitting; 2) prioritize community engagement both to identify local needs and disseminate technical resources; and 3) be submitted by cross-disciplinary collaboratives with experience engaging local communities and technical expertise on siting issues.

A single application should be submitted by each collaborative or team of organizations interested in working together. DOE highly encourages state energy offices (or equivalent state agencies) and university extension offices to lead or participate in applications but recognizes that the organizations best suited to perform these activities will vary from state to state. Other organizations that could play a key role include, but are not limited to, Tribal governments, universities, non-governmental organizations, and community-based organizations. DOE also recommends that teams include organizations familiar with the needs of local communities in the state, organizations with experience providing educational or technical assistance services to local communities on technical subjects, and organizations with technical expertise on renewable energy siting topics (e.g., environmental impacts, tax policies, land use, zoning ordinance development). **DOE will not select more than one application from a single state.**

To facilitate the formation of teams, R-STEP is establishing an online Teaming Partner List where organizations can express interest in partnering with others and share contact information. [Click here to add your information to the Teaming Partner List.](#)

Applicants are encouraged to include organizations with technical expertise as a part of the project team. Selected awardees will also be eligible to receive additional Technical Assistance (TA) from other leading experts, separate from the project budget. Applicants should highlight topic areas where additional TA will be necessary because expertise is lacking as part of the project team. DOE will strive to provide TA across awardees equitably based on TA requests from awardees and funding availability.

Successful applicants will:

- Demonstrate an understanding of siting and permitting processes in their state, including relevant policies and regulatory context for large-scale renewable energy projects.
- Articulate how proposed activities will address the siting and planning needs of state, local, and/or Tribal governments. See below for a list of example activities that could be included.
- Describe how the questions, concerns, and priorities of host communities will be assessed and addressed, including specific considerations for the needs of disadvantaged communities and Tribes, or other underrepresented groups in the state, and how their perspectives will be represented on the project team.
- Incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion principles into the goals of the project.
- Present a credible plan for the long-term maintenance of the initiative and resources developed with awarded funds (i.e., plans beyond the term of the R-STEP award).
- Provide sufficient justification for why the assembled team or collaborative is best suited to perform the proposed activities.

Examples of activities that could be performed with awarded funds:

- Engaging communities, local and Tribal governments, and other stakeholders to identify priorities and resource needs for renewable energy planning, siting, and permitting.
- Establishing a state-specific technical assistance hub that responds to questions and requests from local governments and/or tribes regarding large-scale renewable energy siting and proactive planning for future deployment.
- Conducting trainings and workshops with local governments and/or tribes to improve technical understanding of renewable energy planning and siting.
- Hiring or subcontracting to expand technical capacity on siting processes, renewable energy technologies, community engagement planning and execution, community plan development, etc.
- Developing state-specific resources to support community planning for renewable energy and implementation of siting best practices.

Applications Specifically Not of Interest:

- Applications that seek funding for a single specific local community. Applications should be focused on state-wide efforts to build capacity that can be leveraged by all communities within the state.
- Applications led by developers of renewable energy facilities, for-profit organizations, or national laboratories.
- Applications that focus on the siting and permitting of transmission infrastructure.
- Applications that focus exclusively on permitting of distributed energy sources, such as rooftop solar, residential wind, and residential battery storage.
- Applications that seek to build or expand home or commercial energy efficiency programs.

- Applications that propose to change siting or permitting policies/processes in the state.

A comprehensive description of the Selection Criteria that will guide awardee selections is included at the end of this document.

Application Process and Materials

Applications will consist of an online questionnaire and a Project Narrative (submitted as attachment in questionnaire): [Click here to apply through the questionnaire.](#)

The Project Narrative can be maximum of seven pages (including cover page) using 12-point font and 1-inch margins. Any content over seven pages will not be considered by reviewers. Applicants must use the template provided and follow the guidance below when developing the Project Narrative:

1. Cover Page (1 page)
2. Project Description and Objectives (2 page maximum)
 - a. *Background*: Introduce key considerations that inform the scope and approach of the project, such as siting and permitting processes, regulatory context, stakeholder needs, and related challenges within the state.
 - b. *Vision and Objectives*: Clearly describe the merit and relevance of the program or initiative being developed. Include justification for why the proposed approach is best suited to address needs of stakeholders in the state with specific discussion of how the project would help address the needs of disadvantaged communities.
 - c. *Impact*: Thoroughly describe how proposed activities will impact planning, siting, and permitting for large-scale renewable energy facilities in the state.
3. Project Workplan and Budget (2 page maximum)
 - a. *Tasks, Milestones, and Budget Table*: Using the template provided, describe the major tasks to be performed by the project team throughout the course of the project, including expected milestones, duration, and budget for each task.
 - b. *Risks and Mitigation Strategies*: Describe key risks associated with proposed activities and identify associated mitigation strategies for each.
4. Project Team and Technical Assistance Needs (2 page maximum)
 - a. *Project team*: Identify each organization participating in the project and describe their capabilities, expertise, responsibilities, and relevant resources (e.g., facilities, existing online information hubs, TA materials) being leveraged. Organization descriptions should reflect diversity of expertise within the project team and highlight ability to engage communities on topics related to energy justice and equity.
 - b. *Additional Technical Assistance Needs*: Identify gaps in technical expertise within the project team that could be addressed through TA from third-party organizations (e.g., national laboratories, academics, industry, and other experts).

If selected, awardees will establish a business-to-business agreement with ENERGYWERX and define project activities (i.e., tasks, milestones, and deliverables) in a concise Statement of Effort (SOE) document. DOE also expects awardees to provide regular updates on project progress through quarterly calls and concise reports, and to participate in peer-to-peer learning opportunities with other awardees (e.g., virtual workshops) a few times per year.

Project Selection Criteria

Criterion 1: Project Merit, Impact, and Relevance (30%)

- Applicant clearly describes the current large-scale renewable energy siting and permitting processes, stakeholder needs, regulatory context, and related challenges within their state.
- Applicant clearly describes the proposed objectives and vision for a new or expanded program or initiative with direct relevance to R-STEP's stated goals.
- Applicant sufficiently describes proposed activities to meaningfully engage multiple local communities and justifies why the proposed program is well-suited to address their needs.
- Applicant identifies metrics of project success and commits to tracking progress toward the applicant's stated objectives.
- Applicant clearly describes the impact of EERE funding and presents a credible plan to maintain the program or developed resources beyond the period of performance.

Criterion 2: Project Workplan (30%)

- Applicant clearly describes approach and critical path, demonstrating how proposed tasks will identify and meet the needs of local communities and expand the technical capacity of state, local, and Tribal governments.
- Applicant describes clear, detailed, and timely activities and additional technical assistance needs to execute the project with a high likelihood of success.
- Applicant clearly describes how dissemination strategies are tailored to meet the needs of communities that need it most.
- Applicant sufficiently demonstrates thoughtful consideration of risks and challenges to proposed approach, including mitigation strategies.
- Applicant presents a reasonable budget for the proposed activities and objectives.

Criterion 3: Team and Resources (30%)

- Project team is cross-disciplinary and has experience facilitating stakeholder engagement and providing technical assistance on technical issues to local communities in the state. Team is able to address unique needs of communities in the state.
- Project team includes experts on topics critical to proposed activities.
- Applicant clearly describes relevant resources, roles and responsibilities, qualifications, expertise, and time commitment of each team member that corresponds with proposed activities to ensure high likelihood of success.

Criterion 4: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (10%)

- Applicant sufficiently incorporates diversity, equity, and inclusion principles into the goals of the project and sufficiently discusses how the project addresses the needs of Tribes and/or disadvantaged communities in their state.
- Applicant describes approach for engaging underserved communities and proposes activities that seek to improve outcomes to communities hosting large-scale renewable energy facilities.
- Project team consists of diverse organizations and individuals with experience working with underserved communities applying energy justice principles.