COMMUNITY RENEWABLE ENERGY GRANT PROGRAM

Advisory Committee

Questions for Discussion at Advisory Committee Meeting on October 14, 2021

After an orientation about the new state law establishing the Community Renewable Energy Grant Program and the role of the Advisory Committee, the October 14 meeting will focus on a discussion around the questions outlined below. Advisory Committee members will also be invited to provide additional written feedback about these questions or other meeting topics.

Equity Metrics

HB 2021 is crafted to ensure equitable distribution of funds, and the program will only succeed if it reaches Oregonians of diverse racial, social, and economic backgrounds. The bill requires that 50% or more of the grants are to be awarded to projects that primarily serve environmental justice communities. Additionally, projects located in environmental justice communities are to receive priority scoring under a competitive review process. ODOE will need to evaluate projects to determine if the benefits accrue to an environmental justice community, so the program guidelines will need to provide clear guidance to applicants about how to demonstrate the project will benefit environmental justice communities.

HB 2021, Section 1 (5) "Environmental justice communities" includes communities of color, communities experiencing lower incomes, tribal communities, rural communities, coastal communities, communities with limited infrastructure and other communities traditionally underrepresented in public processes and adversely harmed by environmental and health hazards, including seniors, youth and persons with disabilities.

Question: What measurable criteria could be established to enable ODOE to ensure a project is serving an EJ community?

Question: What metrics can be established to enable ODOE to evaluate involvement and leadership by representatives of environmental justice communities in developing grant applications?

Question: Should applicants be responsible for demonstrating their status as a qualifying community? If so, what specific evidence can be provided by applicants?

Question: Should ODOE develop a standardized process for applicants to demonstrate qualifications as an EJ community? If so, how?

Question: If applicants are required to demonstrate their status as an EJ community, are there tools available to help demonstrate qualification? Are these tools accessible to smaller communities with limited staff to develop grant applications? Are EJ Screen[1] and U.S. Census analysis good tools for the program to use to help determine if an applicant qualifies as an EJ community?

Question: Are there other grant programs in Oregon or in other states that seek to benefit EJ communities that could be used as a model?

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[1] EJ Screen is an environmental justice mapping and screening tool developed by EPA that provides a nationally consistent dataset and approach for combining environmental and demographic indicators. EJSCREEN users choose a geographic area; the tool then provides demographic and environmental information for that area.

Energy Resilience Considerations

HB 2021 provides the first program in Oregon specifically targeted to community energy resilience. The bill requires that 50% or more of grants are to be awarded to community energy resilience projects. The bill defines these projects as renewable energy systems that support the energy resilience of structures or facilities that are essential to the public welfare. Additionally, energy resilience projects are to receive priority scoring under a competitive review process. ODOE will need to evaluate projects to determine energy resilience benefits.

Question: Are there existing designations of structures or facilities, essential to public welfare, that ODOE could consider adopting or modifying for purposes of this program? For example, some existing designations that staff have researched include those identified by FEMA and Oregon Office of Emergency Management.

Question: To what extent should ODOE's rules prioritize projects that demonstrate alignment with a FEMA-approved Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan?

Question: What specific resilience metrics could be included in program rules to enable differentiation between applicants? For example, some resilience metrics that staff have researched include criticality of the facility or structure, population served, number of people served, and location in a high-risk area.

Question: Should ODOE establish minimum criteria to qualify a project as a resilience project? For example, some minimum criteria that staff have researched include critical infrastructure to be powered and whether the structure or facility could be expected to survive a natural disasters or other resilience events.

Additional Priority Scoring Considerations

HB 2021 includes additional priority scoring requirements beyond equity and resilience considerations. Please consider the questions associated with the following additional priorities.

HB 2021, Section 30 (10)(b) Demonstrate significant prior investments in energy efficiency measures at the project location or will result in aggregate improvements to demand response capabilities.

Question: What constitutes a significant prior investment?

HB 2021, Section 30 (10)(d) Projects constructed in part or in whole by disadvantaged business enterprises, emerging small businesses or businesses that are owned by minorities, women or disabled veterans.

Question: Should ODOE establish a minimum ratio of project funds to be awarded to qualifying contractors? As contracts may not be awarded until the grant funding is in place, how would an applicant demonstrate compliance?

HB 2021, Section 30 (10)(e) Include inclusive hiring and promotion policies for workers working on the projects.

Question: Should ODOE establish a minimum ratio of project funds to be awarded to qualifying contractors? As contracts may not be awarded until the grant funding is in place, how would an applicant demonstrate compliance?