



Office of Clean Energy Demonstrations

## Notice of Intent No.: DE-FOA-0003423

DISCLAIMER: The “Notice of Intent to Issue” is for informational purposes only; the Department of Energy (DOE) is not seeking comments on the information in this notice. Applications are not being accepted at this time. Any information contained in this notice is subject to change.

### **This is a Notice of Intent to Issue: Notice of Funding Opportunity No. DE-FOA-0003428 Energy Improvements in Rural or Remote Areas FY24**

#### 1. Introduction

The Office of Clean Energy Demonstrations (OCED) intends to issue a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) entitled “Energy Improvements in Rural or Remote Areas FY24.” The goals of this investment area are to:

- 1. Deliver measurable and sustained benefits to people who live in rural or remote areas** by funding replicable clean energy projects that lower energy costs, improve energy access and resilience, increase economic opportunity, and/or reduce environmental harm.
- 2. Demonstrate rural or remote energy system approaches** using climate-resilient technologies, business structures that promote economic resilience, accessible and appropriate financing mechanisms, and/or best practices in community leadership and engagement, and workforce development.
- 3. Build clean energy knowledge, capacity, and self-reliance in rural and remote parts of America.**

Funding will support materials, equipment, time, labor, and other resources to build clean energy projects in rural or remote communities and run other allowable activities as proposed (e.g., collaboration, outreach, and engagement with Tribes and stakeholders, or workforce development programs).

ANTICIPATED PROGRAM SCOPE AND CHARACTERISTICS	
Total DOE Funding	Up to \$400M (million)
Project Funding	\$2M–\$50M contribution from DOE; 5–50% minimum required non-Federal cost share (i.e., from applicant). <sup>1</sup> Amount depends on applicant type and topic area.

*Table continues on next page.*

<sup>1</sup> Applicants may meet the cost share requirement through staff time, municipal or Tribal budgets, philanthropic funds, or other contributions from a third-party entity to support project implementation or increase impact. The cost share must come from non-Federal sources unless otherwise allowed by law and may also be met through the contribution of in-kind services that advance the proposed project. See here for an explanation of cost share: <https://www.energy.gov/sites/default/files/2023-05/OCED%20Cost%20Sharing%20Guidance.pdf>

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ANTICIPATED PROGRAM SCOPE AND CHARACTERISTICS (cont.)	
Project Count	16-69 projects
Key Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide cleaner, more resilient, more reliable, and/or cheaper local energy sources for rural and remote communities.</li> <li>• Increase community capacity to plan, build, and operate clean energy systems, e.g., by developing available technical expertise locally and with partners, and/or increasing community support for those projects.</li> <li>• Demonstrate models of approaches, visions, and paths to share with and support similar communities pursuing clean energy planning and projects.</li> <li>• Identify and publish further needs and opportunities for supporting rural and remote clean energy projects, to share with interested parties.</li> </ul>
Requirements	<p>This program serves rural and remote communities, namely those with 10,000 people or fewer.<sup>2</sup></p> <p>Projects must support at least one of these eligible activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Improving overall cost-effectiveness of energy generation, transmission, or distribution systems;</li> <li>B. Siting or upgrading transmission and distribution lines;</li> <li>C. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions from energy generation in rural or remote areas;</li> <li>D. Providing or modernizing electric generation facilities;</li> <li>E. Developing microgrids; and</li> <li>F. Increasing energy efficiency.</li> </ul>
Eligible Entities	<p>The following types of entities are eligible to apply:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• American Indian and Alaska Native Tribal Governments (Tribal Nations)</li> <li>• State, territorial, and local governmental entities</li> <li>• Non-profit entities</li> <li>• Labor unions</li> <li>• For-profit entities</li> <li>• Rural electric cooperatives</li> <li>• Farming associations and cooperatives</li> <li>• Institutions of higher education</li> <li>• Incorporated consortia</li> <li>• Unincorporated consortia</li> </ul>

Table continues on next page.

<sup>2</sup> For this program, the Department of Energy considers a “rural or remote community” as one meeting the definition of “rural or remote area” in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Section 40103—“a city, town, or unincorporated area that has a population of not more than 10,000 inhabitants.” All communities that directly benefit from the proposed project must meet the definition of “rural or remote area.”

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ANTICIPATED PROGRAM SCOPE AND CHARACTERISTICS (cont.)	
Priorities	<p>This funding opportunity prioritizes the following:</p> <p>Communities and populations with at least one of these characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disadvantaged communities as defined by the Justice40 Initiative<sup>3</sup> and identified in the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool<sup>4</sup></li> <li>• Energy communities as defined by the Inflation Reduction Act<sup>5</sup> or communities that are likely to become energy communities in the near future</li> <li>• Low-income communities and populations<sup>6</sup></li> <li>• Underserved and/or underrepresented communities and populations<sup>7</sup></li> <li>• High energy burden communities and populations<sup>8</sup></li> <li>• Frontline communities and populations, i.e., those hit first and worst by climate change<sup>9</sup></li> <li>• Communities with a low Rural Capacity Index<sup>10</sup></li> </ul> <p>Teams that include members who are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highly familiar with local community priorities and dynamics</li> <li>• Members of (or who represent) priority communities or populations (as referenced above)</li> <li>• Labor unions or other local workforce development organizations</li> <li>• Credible with and trusted by community members</li> <li>• Residents of proposed host community(ies)</li> <li>• Experienced in project development with proposed technologies in similar geographic and cultural contexts</li> <li>• Capable of efficiently and effectively administering government funding</li> </ul> <p>Projects that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate learnings which are applicable to other rural or remote communities across the United States and territories.</li> </ul>

<sup>3</sup> Established by EO 14008, on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad, the Justice40 Initiative sets a goal that 40% of the overall benefits of certain federal investments in climate, clean energy, and other areas flow to disadvantaged communities that are marginalized by underinvestment and overburdened by pollution. Consistent with Justice40 guidance, M-21-28 and M-23-09, DOE recognizes disadvantaged communities as the census tracts defined and identified as disadvantaged by the White House Council on Environmental Quality’s Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST), located at <https://screeningtool.geoplatform.gov/>, as well as all Federally Recognized Tribes (whether or not they have land). See [https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/M-23-09\\_Signed\\_CEQ\\_CPO.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/M-23-09_Signed_CEQ_CPO.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> The Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool is located here: <https://screeningtool.geoplatform.gov/en/#3/33.47/-97.5>

<sup>5</sup> Energy communities are defined here: <https://energycommunities.gov/energy-community-tax-credit-bonus/>

<sup>6</sup> Low income as defined in the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool: <https://screeningtool.geoplatform.gov/en/methodology#low-income>

<sup>7</sup> Underserved and underrepresented groups are described and defined here: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/20/executive-order-advancing-racial-equity-and-support-for-underserved-communities-through-the-federal-government/>

<sup>8</sup> High energy burden as defined in the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool: <https://screeningtool.geoplatform.gov/en/methodology#energy-burden>

<sup>9</sup> Frontline communities are defined here as those communities who are the most vulnerable to and will be the most adversely affected by climate change and inequitable actions because of systemic and historical socioeconomic disparities, environmental injustice, or other forms of injustice. See: <https://cpo.noaa.gov/divisions-programs/climate-and-societal-interactions/cap-risa/justice40-initiative/>

<sup>10</sup> Rural Capacity Index as defined here: <https://headwaterseconomics.org/equity/rural-capacity-map/>

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This Notice of Intent (NOI or Notice) describes a preliminary plan that will evolve during the Notice of Funding Opportunity development process. The final funding opportunity may be different than what is described in this document.

## 2. Statutory Authority

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA, Public Law 117-58), also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, authorized the Office of Clean Energy Demonstrations.<sup>11</sup> This Notice of Funding Opportunity is supported under the Energy Improvements in Rural or Remote Areas program.<sup>12</sup>

## 3. Background

Rural and remote areas often have higher energy costs and burden,<sup>13</sup> less resilient energy systems, and fewer alternatives for accessing clean energy compared with their urban counterparts. Furthermore, small communities do not always have the available time, money, or other resources to pursue clean energy options.

This funding opportunity provides support for rural and remote communities to build clean energy projects that benefit their communities. Benefits could include cleaner, more resilient, more reliable, and/or cheaper local energy sources for rural and remote communities. These projects could also increase local energy independence, tax revenue, economic development and diversification, and local jobs. We (i.e., the Office of Clean Energy Demonstrations, unless noted otherwise) expect that this opportunity will enable projects and people to demonstrate inspiring and practical paths so an even broader range and number of rural and remote communities can benefit from clean energy.

This opportunity builds on previous rounds of this Energy Improvements in Rural or Remote Areas program, which include:

- The Energizing Rural Communities Prize (67 winners for phase 1 across 32 states and territories, announced July 2023)<sup>14</sup>
- A funding opportunity announcement (17 selected projects across 20 states, for \$366M total, announced February 2024)<sup>15</sup>
- A grant opportunity (19 selected projects across 12 states, for \$78M total, announced April 2024)<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> IIJA Section 41201 (42 U.S.C. § 18861).

<sup>12</sup> IIJA Section 40103 (42 U.S.C. § 18712(c)).

<sup>13</sup> Based on data from the Low-Income Energy Affordability Data tool, <https://www.energy.gov/scep/slsc/lead-tool>. In 2023, counties with <20,000 people had an energy burden of 4%, vs. 3.12% for counties with ≥20,000 people.

<sup>14</sup> See prize winners here: <https://americanmadechallenges.org/challenges/rural-energy/results>

<sup>15</sup> See selection announcement here: <https://www.energy.gov/oced/energy-improvements-rural-or-remote-areas-selections-award-negotiations>

<sup>16</sup> See selection announcement here: <https://www.energy.gov/oced/energy-improvements-rural-or-remote-areas-grant-selections-award-negotiations>

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### **Eligible technologies and project types**

Applicants must propose projects that support at least one of these eligible activities:

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

Applications may include any technology that meets these eligible activities, as long as those technologies are commercially available (see next paragraph).

For the purposes of this funding opportunity, commercially available technology is defined as a product that has been offered for sale, lease, or license to the public. Applicants can establish that the technology is commercially available by showing the product can be warranted, can be purchased from a commercial vendor for the intended purpose, or some other justification the applicant chooses. The technology must be considered Technology Readiness Level (TRL)<sup>17</sup> 8–9 (the highest two levels) as defined by DOE before construction begins.

### **Barriers to adoption highlighted in this funding opportunity**

This funding opportunity focuses on a few of the non-technical barriers that rural and remote communities can face when building clean energy projects.

The Department of Energy uses the “Adoption Readiness Level” framework<sup>18</sup> to describe these non-technical barriers. Specifically, we seek projects that demonstrate how to address at least one of these items:

- **Community perception:** Working with community members to choose appropriate technologies, locations, and ownership structures can help to build positive perceptions of and relationships with projects. Including community members in decision-making; effective partnerships; and working with local, trusted messengers for communication are other potential approaches for addressing community perception.
- **Permitting & siting:** Some rural and remote residents are wary of projects and technologies that may conflict with other uses of land or water, including agriculture. Topic area 2 in this funding opportunity seeks projects that propose solutions to potential land and water use conflicts.
- **Downstream value chain:** Ensuring that a clean energy project provides direct benefits to the people who pay the financial, environmental, and social costs of that project can help make it more successful.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.directives.doe.gov/directives-documents/400-series/0413.3-EGuide-04/@/@images/file>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.energy.gov/technologytransitions/adoption-readiness-levels-arl-complement-tri>

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## 4. Topic areas and funding details

We intend to offer the following topic areas within this funding opportunity:

### Summary table

Topic Area	Award Size per Project	Total Expected Award Amount for Topic Area	Cost Share for Applicant
1 Open category	\$10M–\$50M	~\$150M	50%, with waiver to 20% (for Tribal, local government, or nonprofit primary applicants)
2 Dual use and co-location	\$10M–\$50M	~\$175M	50%, with waiver to 20% <sup>19</sup>
3 Smaller-scale community-centered	\$2M–\$10M	~\$50M	20%, with waiver to 5%
4 Isolated microgrids & unelectrified buildings	\$2M–\$10M	~\$25M	20%, with waiver to 5%

### Topic area details

Topic Area 1: Open category	
<b>Objective</b> Offer a path to funding rural or remote clean energy infrastructure for many different project types, demonstrating approaches to addressing one or more relevant adoption barriers. (See pg. 5 under “Barriers to adoption highlighted in this funding opportunity” for details.)	
<b>Eligible technologies and activities</b>	Applicants may propose any project type that best serves the community’s need and that reduces environmental impacts, within the program’s six eligible activities. (See pg. 4-5 under “Eligible technologies and project types.”)
<b>Priority technologies and project types</b>	This topic area prioritizes the following technologies or project types (the same as for topic area 3):  Solar, battery energy storage systems, wind, water power (marine energy and hydropower), geothermal (heating and cooling or power generation), biomass/biofuels, microgrids, <sup>20</sup> distribution, converting fossil fuel-powered equipment to electric, and repowering existing renewable energy systems.

<sup>19</sup> For all topic areas, Tribal, local government, or nonprofit primary applicants are eligible for the lower cost share amount (42 U.S.C. § 16352).

<sup>20</sup> A microgrid is a group of interconnected loads and distributed energy resources that acts as a single controllable entity with respect to the grid. It can connect and disconnect from the grid to operate in grid-connected or island mode, including entirely off-grid applications. Microgrids can improve customer reliability and resilience to grid disturbances. Dan Ton and Merrill Smith. October 2012. The U.S. Department of Energy’s Microgrid Initiative. *The Electricity Journal*, 25(8), 84-94. [doi:10.1016/j.tej.2012.09.013](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tej.2012.09.013) ([energy.gov](http://energy.gov))

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<b>Topic Area 2: Dual use and co-location</b>	
<p><b>Objective</b></p> <p>Provide funding for clean energy demonstration projects in rural and remote communities that either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow for using land or water for both energy supply and other activities; or</li> <li>• Are co-located with other activities and result in other benefits beyond energy supply and reduced pollution.</li> </ul> <p>Demonstrations could help to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Address potential conflicts between clean energy and other land and water uses in rural or remote areas;</li> <li>2. Maximize tangible, measurable co-benefits of clean energy projects beyond supplying energy and reducing pollution—including but not limited to economic, workforce, and environmental benefits; and</li> <li>3. Increase equitable access to clean energy through new business models and financing structures.</li> </ol>	
<p><b>Eligible project types</b></p>	<p>Applicants may propose projects that provide co-benefits to communities beyond supplying energy and reducing pollution, e.g., reducing land use conflicts, conserving water, diversifying incomes, and/or enhancing partnerships.</p> <p>Example projects include: agrivoltaics, distributed wind for farmers and farm groups, conduit hydro in irrigation systems, community geothermal heating and cooling systems.</p> <p>For agrivoltaics projects, dual use is defined as agricultural production, such as crop or livestock production, underneath solar panels or adjacent to solar panels (i.e., not solar on barn rooftops).</p>

<b>Topic Area 3: Smaller-scale community-centered</b>	
<p><b>Objective</b></p> <p>Fund smaller-scale clean energy projects that are initiated, driven, and/or broadly supported by residents of the host community(ies).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Projects should increase long-term local capacity for future clean energy projects in the applying community and/or in nearby or peer communities. This could include increasing the availability of technical expertise to plan and develop projects, or improved community perception.</li> <li>• We encourage applicants to collaborate with relevant partners, particularly Tribal governments and community-based organizations that are familiar with the local community, and/or entities (e.g., nonprofits or extension schools) that have experience with developing renewable energy projects in similar areas.</li> </ul>	

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<b>Eligible technologies and activities</b>	Applicants may propose any project type that best serves the community’s needs and that reduces environmental impacts, within the program’s six eligible activities. (See pg. 4-5 under “Eligible technologies and project types.”)
<b>Priority technologies and project types</b>	This topic area prioritizes the following technologies or project types (the same as for topic area 1):  Solar, battery energy storage systems, wind, water power (marine energy and hydropower), geothermal (heating and cooling or power generation), biomass/biofuels, microgrids, <sup>21</sup> distribution, converting fossil fuel-powered equipment to electric, and repowering existing renewable energy systems.

<b>Topic Area 4: Isolated microgrids &amp; unelectrified buildings</b>	
<p><b>Objective</b></p> <p>Build clean energy projects for either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Isolated microgrids<sup>22</sup> (often located in ultra-remote areas and served primarily by diesel generators); or</li> <li>• Unelectrified homes or community buildings not currently served by an electrical grid.</li> </ul> <p>Projects should demonstrate approaches to addressing one or more relevant adoption barriers. (See pg. 5 under “Barriers to adoption highlighted in this funding opportunity” for details.)</p>	
<b>Eligible technologies and activities</b>	Applicants may propose any project type that best serves the community’s needs and that reduces environmental impacts, within the program’s six eligible activities. (See pg. 4-5 under “Eligible technologies and project types.”)

For all topic areas, we welcome project aggregators, i.e., entities that identify and propose several projects together in one application. The project aggregator approach could be used to reduce overall project costs and/or to include communities that may not have capacity to apply for this funding on their own.

**Projects not of interest**

We do not expect to fund the following project types through this opportunity:

- Large transmission projects (i.e., projects >69kV, or proposals of lines >20 miles).
- Single-campus projects that serve only the regular operation of that facility (e.g., solar on individual hospitals or schools). For topic areas 3 and 4, applicants may propose single-campus projects that include backup power from emission-free sources for critical community-serving buildings (e.g., solar plus battery storage for a cultural center that serves as a command center and warming shelter during power outages).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

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- Electric vehicles (EVs) or projects solely focused on EV charging. EV charging infrastructure may be a component of a broader, otherwise eligible project.
- Projects including only weatherization.

### **Concept paper questions**

We may require applicants to submit concept papers as a first stage of the application process. If so, we may ask applicants the following questions:

1. **Technical Approach and Impact:** What are your community's current energy challenges and priorities, especially for underserved and underrepresented groups or members of Justice40 communities? Tell us about your proposed project, including project and technology type, size, and location. Why is this technology or project type a good fit for your community?
2. **Financial and Market Viability:** How do you expect energy costs and energy burden to change for community members because of this project? Why is this project worth the cost for you? How do you plan to pay for the cost share for this project? How do you plan to pay for the project's operations and maintenance?
3. **Team:** Tell us about your team and their experience, including partners involved in the project, and how you have worked together and plan to work together for this project and in the future. How does your team represent the communities involved in your project, especially underserved and underrepresented groups or members of Justice40 communities?
4. **Workplan:** Tell us about your approach to plan and complete this project. How do you plan to check on progress and adjust your approach along the way? What is your plan to ensure you have enough qualified people to plan, develop, build, and operate the project?
5. **Community:** How will this project benefit your community and local workers, including underserved and underrepresented groups or members of Justice40 communities? How have you worked with community members and labor representation on this project and included them as part of the decision-making process? What are the potential negative impacts of this project and how do you plan to mitigate them?

## **5. Submission and Registration Requirements for Full Applications**

We envision awarding multiple financial assistance awards in the form of cooperative agreements.<sup>23</sup> The Notice of Funding Opportunity will be released on or about September 2024. We may require applicants to submit concept papers as a first stage of the application process. If we do require concept papers, we will notify applicants of whether they are “encouraged” or “discouraged” to submit a full application. We expect to announce award selections in mid- or late-2025.

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<sup>23</sup> For more details about cooperative agreements, and applying for federal funding for clean energy projects in rural or remote communities, see *OCED's Federal Energy Funding for Rural and Remote Areas: A Guide for Communities*, <https://www.energy.gov/media/309114>

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We are issuing this Notice of Intent to increase awareness of the upcoming funding opportunity, and to encourage potential applicants and supporting organizations to consider and prepare applications.

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**OCED will not accept questions at this time about the potential Notice of Funding Opportunity. Details on how to submit questions and comments will be provided in the funding opportunity, when issued.** Once we issue the Notice of Funding Opportunity, we will accept and answer questions on our website during the period when the Notice of Funding Opportunity is open.

We plan to issue the Notice of Funding Opportunity via the OCED eXCHANGE website <https://oced-eXCHANGE.energy.gov/>. If you wish to receive official notifications and information from OCED regarding this Notice of Funding Opportunity, you should register in OCED eXCHANGE. When the Notice of Funding Opportunity is released, we will only accept applications through OCED eXCHANGE.

In anticipation of releasing the funding opportunity, we encourage applicants to complete the following steps, which are required to submit an application. Some of these steps may take some time to complete, so we encourage applicants to start the process well in advance of any application deadlines.

1. Register and create an account in OCED eXCHANGE at <https://oced-eXCHANGE.energy.gov/>. This account will allow the user to apply to any open OCED Notice of Funding Opportunity that is currently in OCED eXCHANGE. Please note that potential **applicants must create an account in OCED eXCHANGE even if the organization has already registered for a different Department of Energy eXCHANGE account.** It is recommended that each organization or business unit, whether acting as a team or a single entity, **use only one** account as the point of contact for each submission. Please submit questions related to the registration process and use of the OCED Exchange website to: [OCED-ExchangeSupport@hq.doe.gov](mailto:OCED-ExchangeSupport@hq.doe.gov)
2. Register with the System for Award Management (SAM) at <https://www.sam.gov>. Designating an Electronic Business Point of Contact (EBiz POC) and obtaining a special password called a Marketing Partner Identification Number (MPIN) are important steps in SAM registration. Please **update your SAM registration annually**. Upon registration, SAM will automatically assign a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI).
3. Register in FedConnect at <https://www.fedconnect.net/>. To create an organization account, your organization's SAM MPIN is required. For more information about the SAM MPIN or other registration requirements, review the FedConnect Ready, Set, Go! Guide at [https://www.fedconnect.net/FedConnect/Marketing/Documents/FedConnect\\_Ready\\_Set\\_Go.pdf](https://www.fedconnect.net/FedConnect/Marketing/Documents/FedConnect_Ready_Set_Go.pdf)

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4. Register in Grants.gov to receive automatic updates when Amendments to a Notice of Funding Opportunity are posted. However, please note that applications will not be accepted through Grants.gov, <http://www.grants.gov/>. All applications must be submitted through OCED eXCHANGE.

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