

Vermont Public Service Department & Clean Energy Development Fund

Questions and Answers on the July 19, 2022

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

For ACRE

Updated on 8/9/2022

Question: Can the Department explain why projects commissioned after July 1, 2021 are eligible for funding? Is the intent to allow already commissioned projects receive funds for capital costs or to increase enrollment numbers into low-income bill assistance programs?

Answer: *The effective date of the bill providing funding for the ACRE Program was July 1, 2021. The department is considering projects commissioned on that date to be new for the purposes of this program. Using projects that were commissioned from July 1, 2021 makes assistance available to Vermonters with low income more immediately as the need is also immediate.*

Question: On page 6, section D #1, power procurement costs, can you clarify if this requirement is applicable to a project that is utility owned and behind the utility's metering point with VELCO?

Answer: *For projects that are utility owned the procurement costs would be the estimated levelized cost of electricity (LCOE) on a \$/kWh basis for the plant.*

Question: Methodology of the Award: how does the Department intend to determine which regions or counties within Vermont are struggling the most with job losses, declines in demographics and income levels? What information from the Applicant does the Department need to determine which community has a greater priority need and could receive a greater transformative impact under this funding?

Answer: *The Department will first need to determine which regions and counties will be served by the program based on the utilities interested in participating. The prioritization will be based on the job loss and income data that is available on a county or regional basis.*

Question: On page 7, section 1, how does the selection committee intend to evaluate the criteria listed? What criteria will the selection committee use to rank projects based on need, population served, equity, geographic equity, and coordinated programs? How will the Department define opportunities for coordinated programs?

Answer: *Need may be evaluated on the availability of existing program(s) to support low-income customers and may (depending on the availability of data) include the % of households in the utility's service area that would meet the program's income eligibility levels.*

Geographic Equity be evaluated based on those DUs that apply and be measured by the geographic spread of eligible households state-wide.

Equity Impact will be evaluated on the affects the program will have on marginalized populations communities, or groups that have historically experienced systemic barriers to access, resources, and infrastructure investments. The definition may include communities of color, women, non-heterosexual sexual orientations, transgender individuals who identify along the gender spectrum, immigrants and refugees, people with disabilities, and others who have received limited access to benefits, services, investments, and resources from public/private institutions, including the State of Vermont.

Coordinated programs would be defined as two or more utilities pooling funding from their ACRE allocation and creating a program that may offer some economy of scale. Features of a coordinated program could potentially reduce administrative cost, increase purchasing power and include transferability of memberships between the DUs.

Question: It's also unclear how geographic equity will be evaluated by the selection committee. For example, Lamoille County has customers served by GMP, VEC, WEC, Stowe, Morrisville, Hyde Park, Johnson, and Hardwick. How does the Department plan to rank utilities like Stowe or Hyde Park against utilities like GMP and WEC that span multiple towns, counties, and regions?

Answer: *The determination of geographic equity will be dependent on the utilities participating in the program. The goal is to ensure, to the extent possible, that low-income households across the state have equal access to the program.*

Question: Why did the Department decide to use residential customer counts to provide an estimated budget allocation for each utility?

Answer: *The Department is using residential customer counts for the ACRE Program because the program is intended for residential electricity customers and thus the benefit needs to be tied to a residential meter.*

Question: How does the Department plan to adjust residential customer data or persons living within each service territory based on a adjuster for energy burden?

Answer: *The Department will use available energy burden data to develop a coefficient to adjust the funding available to utilities.*

Question: Has the Department considered some unified process for all the grant recipients to use for income verification or should grant recipients plan to develop our own (third party) income verification system (and plan to cover the cost of subcontracting this work with grant funds)?

Answer: *The Department envisioned a unified process for income verification initially in the straw proposal put forward in 2021 but is not requiring there be such state-wide process. The grant recipients should plan on developing an income verification system for their program. Such a system could be a joint effort with other grantees, sub-contracted to other entities, or a system that is administered only by the DU. Grant funds may be spent on the income verification system.*

Question: If the participant moves outside the service territory we understand from the DPS June 6 draft ACRE outline that the first step would be that the participant gets to transfer the membership to another “income-qualifying customer”. Can you clarify expectations around how this happens? If the departing participant offers a name and the potential new participant is not responsive, or doesn’t income qualify, can the DU immediately go to the next potential participant in our queue?

Answer: *The membership in an ACRE funded program shall be an asset of the customer that has a level of fungibility offering the customer member the agency to pass that along to another income-qualifying customer if they chose to do so. If the departing participant were to propose a transfer to a customer that is unresponsive or doesn’t qualify for the program (due to income or is not a member of the same DU), the DU would be able to transfer the membership to a different income-qualifying customer of their choosing.*