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40599 DOE Puerto Rico Energy Resilience Fund Webinar

WHITNEY BELL: Hello and welcome to the Puerto Rico Energy Resilience Fund webinar. I am Whitney Bell with ICF and I will be your host today. First, we have a few housekeeping items for today's webinar. If you need to view the live captioning, please refer to the closed caption button in the bottom left hand corner of your screen. Please click the CC and you will be able to follow along. This WebEx meeting is being recorded and may be used by the U.S. Department of Energy. If you do not wish to have your voice recorded, please do not speak during the call. If you do not wish to have your image recorded, please turn off your camera or participate by phone. If you speak during the call or use the video connection, your presumed consent to recording and use of your voice or image. Fortunately for you, all participants are in listen only mode.

We are taking questions today. Please submit them using your chat box and select send to host. Any questions not answered during today's Q&A session will be used to inform the program FAQ. Additionally, if you're having any technical issues or questions,

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please type them in the chat box and select send to host for assistance. We will post a copy of today's presentation on the Puerto Rico Energy Resilience Fund webinar webpage by tomorrow and then a recording of today's webinar as well as the transcript will be available on the same webpage in about two weeks.

Finally, we have our standard notice, it will be on the screen in just a moment. None of the information in this presentation is legally binding. To the extent that any consent content presented may disagree with the information on the RFI, the RFI is the superseding document. The purpose of this webinar is to provide an overview of the Puerto Rico Energy Resilience Fund and highlight the RFI submission process. Any content included in this presentation is intended for information purposes only. All applicants are strongly encouraged to carefully read the RFI guidelines and adhere to them.

Alright, with that out of the way, I'd like to kick off today's meeting. You'll hear from Agustín Carbó, Director of the Puerto Rico Grid Recovery

Modernization Team, for his opening remarks. Agustín, welcome, I'll go ahead and turn this over to you.

AGUSTÍN CARBÓ: Thank you, Wendy and welcome everyone. We are really excited about the opportunity to have \$1 billion dollars dedicated to Puerto Rico for this important part of the energy transition happening in Puerto Rico. But first of all, I wanted to talk a little bit about what, you know, what is our office? The Grid Deployment Office, which will be these funds. Basically, the GDO works to provide electricity to everyone, everywhere by maintaining and invested in critical generation facilities to ensure resource adequacy and improving and expanding transmission and distribution systems to ensure that all have access to reliable and affordable electricity. Basically, there's three divisions. The Generation Credit Division, which works with existing generation facilities to ensure resiliency and reliability, and works to improve electricity markets as the wholesale and distribution levels.

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The Transmission Division supports innovative efforts in transmission reliability and clean energy analysis and programs and energy infrastructure and risk analysis in support of the administration's priorities to enhance grid resilience. And finally, the Grid Modernization Division, which oversees activities to prevent outages and enhance the resilience of the energy grid. Next slide, please.

For the last year we've been working, as you all know, in the PR100 Study. Since 2017, Hurricanes Maria and Irma devastated the grid. DOE and six of its national labs have provided expert technical support on grid recovery efforts to both the federal and Puerto Rico agencies. Last year, DOE and FEMA launched this Puerto Rico 100 Study to generate community-driven pathways to meet Puerto Rico's target of 100% renewable electricity by 2050 and improved energy resiliency, pursuant to Act 17 of 2019.

After Hurricane Fiona, President Biden tasked DOE Secretary Jennifer Granholm with forming the Puerto

Rico Grid Recovery, our modernization team, to work across federal agencies to support rapid infrastructure deployment and expedite the island's recovery. Basically, we're trying to cut all the red tape that is impeding this work to progress, as all the Puerto Ricans are expecting. Next slide.

And that's it for myself. So I'm more than happy to introduce Eric Britton, who's been leading this effort. So, Whitney, I'll take it back to you.

WHITNEY BELL: Great, thank you so much for your comments. We really appreciate it. As Agustín said, I would like to now welcome Eric Britton, the Program Manager with Grid Deployment Office, for his presentation on the Puerto Rico Energy Resilience Fund RFI. Eric, we can see you. We can hear you. The floor is yours.

ERIC BRITTON: All right. Can you hear me? Good afternoon, everyone. Thanks for joining us this afternoon. Thanks to Whitney for facilitating and to Director Goodwill for the opening remarks. Again, I'm

a program manager at DOE on the Puerto Rico team. Happy to be here with you all. Alright, so in December 2022, just a couple months ago, Congress approved \$1 billion for the U.S. DOE to improve the resilience of the Puerto Rican electric grid, with a focus on the island's most vulnerable and disadvantaged households and communities.

So the congressional language stipulates, I'm paraphrasing here, that DOE target beneficiaries that are low and moderate income households and households that include individuals with disabilities. We are also going to coordinate with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, or HUD, on these activities, including the ongoing implementation of similar programs. For example, the HUD Community Development Block Grants. And lastly, this funding is to remain available until expended, so there's no sunset.

All right, so DOE is expecting to release one or more competitive solicitations in the areas of technology

deployment, community engagement, education, and workforce development. So we plan to focus on two types of deployment, residential and community. So for residential single family homes, we are pursuing an accelerated solicitation for investment in residential rooftop solar and storage. On the community side, which we'll focus on, we're considering investments for low income multifamily buildings and critical services in low income areas. Technological solutions could include community solar grid scale storage, microgrids and others. But to move forward with this, we need your assistance on designing, deployment and support programs that take into account a diverse range of factors to maximize impact.

So with that in mind, we published a request for information on February 21<sup>st</sup> to inform our program design and implementation strategy. So we're requesting your feedback across five different topic areas: technology and engineering, beneficiary and community considerations, financial assistance, technical assistance, capacity building and workforce

development, and lastly, monitoring, evaluation and auditing.

So just to give an example for the second category, as you can see here on the right, based on recent census data, there are over 500,000 households that could potentially qualify for these funds to the letter of the law. And the very lowest income are spread across Puerto Rico and different concentrations represented on the bottom right, by the dark blue, being the highest concentration areas for very low income border regions.

So for example, \$1 billion sounds like a lot of funding, but it is still a scarce resource and we still need to allocate it appropriately with your guidance on how best to prioritize across geographies, income levels, types of disabilities, and many other factors.

So in our RFI, you can see questions like the following: what challenges should DOE consider regarding rooftop solar and storage deployment? For



example: system size, system cost, average household load, average household critical load, household repairs to roof for wall reinforcement, storage requirements to ride their outages, etc? How should DOE prioritize possible beneficiaries? Are there existing criteria or screening tools or databases or definitions that DOE should incorporate into program design? What are the major non-technological barriers to rooftop solar and storage ownership? Like property titles or lack thereof, roofing material, roof repair, the education gap in adopting a new technology, hesitation in signing long term agreements, actually locating target beneficiaries, etc.

What applicable models exist to award financial and technical assistance to nonprofits and community organizations to actually develop a pipeline of community-led energy resilience projects? And lastly, what existing workforce education and training efforts are preparing workers for this industry? And how can those efforts be best supported or augmented under this fund or these programs?

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So there are about four times as many questions in the actual RFI, but this is a sampling to give you an idea or understanding. So the next few slides we're going to review some of the RFI submission details.

When does the RFI comment period open and close? I mentioned it opened on February 21<sup>st</sup>, it will remain live until April 21<sup>st</sup>, and then close at 5:00 PM Eastern Time. Is there a page limit? The page limit for responses is 20 pages in length. How do you actually submit your responses to the RFI? Responses to the RFI can be submitted electronically as a Microsoft Word attachment to this e-mail address PuertoRicoGDO@hq.doe.gov. Responses can also be mailed to our office: Grid deployment Office at 1000 Independence Ave. Southwest, Washington, DC 20585. I would recommend submitting them electronically, given the delay in snail mail.

And can I submit responses in English or Spanish? We are accepting responses in both languages, English or Spanish is absolutely fine. Will your answers be

posted online after you submit them? We will not publish the information collected in response to this RFI. It will not be posted on our website or publicly anywhere else. What if I want to add information to my response that doesn't directly address the question? That's also totally fine. You may add additional information. As long as it's within the maximum page limit, but if there's a question you think we should have asked, and you have an answer to that question, please do include it.

Do I need to submit answers to all the questions? You do not need to submit answers to all the questions. You can pick and choose according to where your response can inform our program design efforts. If your organization or company is focused on one particular area, feel free to only answer those questions and send us a partial response. We will still consider it. Can I submit anonymous answers? We asked that respondents provide the following information at the start of their response: name, company or institution contact, address, phone number and e-mail address.

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Can you or should you share business confidential or proprietary information in your response? Responses received under this RFI are subject to public disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act, or FOIA. Respondents are strongly advised to not include any information in their responses that might be considered business sensitive, proprietary, or otherwise confidential. If, however, a respondent chooses to submit business sensitive, proprietary, or otherwise confidential information, it must be clearly and conspicuously marked as such, in the response. So right here on the right, we have a notice of restriction on disclosure and use of data. You have to list the exact pages with proprietary information and post this notice at the front of your response. This information is included word for word in the in the RFI document, so you can reference them there after the fact.

Alright so, what comes next? After the RFI comment period closes, we will review and consider all responses in the formulation of our program

strategies. We may also contact individual respondents to ask for additional information or clarification of their responses. We, as I mentioned, we expect to release one or more competitive solicitations in the areas of technology deployment, community engagement, education and workforce development. We aim to release the first competitive solicitation this summer, the summer of 2023.

Also note that we are analyzing, reviewing, and analyzing our five responses on a rolling basis, so I encourage everyone to adopt the mentality of the earlier, the better, because we'll be able to review them and follow up with questions as necessary. And again, as a reminder, the absolute deadline is April 21<sup>st</sup> at 5:00 PM. And the e-mail address to submit your responses is PuertoRicoGDO@hq.doe.gov.

So lastly, here's a slide with all the important resources and links related to this program and DOE's work in general. So a link to the RFI, a link to our FAQ, a link to a one pager fact sheet on this program, on this fund, a link to our broader team,

and lastly, a link to more information on the PR100 Study, that Director Carbó mentioned at the beginning of this presentation. All right, I'd like to now hand it back to Whitney. I think we have some time to answer questions from you all. So, Whitney, over to you.

WHITNEY BELL: Thank you so much, Eric. As he mentioned, we do have time for Q&A. So please submit your questions in the chat box and select send the host. Any questions not answered during today's Q&A session will be used to inform the FAQ, so don't feel like you're not being heard if we can't get to your question. So let's go ahead and get started.

Eric, who would be eligible to apply for this initiative? Would this be solar only or solar - Sorry. Is it solar only or solar and wind? And could municipalities apply to support their low income communities? And what's the maximum capacity? So we can -- If you want to go one at a time there, I'm happy to remind you of the questions as we go, it's a three parter.

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ERIC BRITTON: No, that's OK. And thank you for that question. I just want to clarify that we're still in the RFI stage, so the data and perspective collection stage of this program, so it would be unfair to you if we released this RFI and already had all of the guidelines already worked out in place. So we want this RFI process to truly inform how we shape this program. So at this time, we don't have specific answer to those questions. We heard from stakeholders loud and clear that an interactive RFI process would be the most productive to designing a good program. So I would encourage you to send us your advice and your recommendations on those questions that you brought up. We're eager to hear from everyone and incorporate your knowledge and local data into this process. So that's all I can say for now.

WHITNEY BELL: Great, this person is asking if you could discuss the access to renewable energy to those people without property title and those who live in rental homes. Could you address that in any way?

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ERIC BRITTON: Yeah, this is a great point about program eligibility. We've heard, you know, property titles are an issue and that many low income families are renters. So we need to look at the broader space here, coordinate closely with existing, other existing programs and upcoming programs. For example, Viviendas, the Puerto Rico Department of Housing's rooftop solar program to understand how they're building in flexibilities to mitigate some of these obstacles, like property titles and the renter community. Thank you for the question.

WHITNEY BELL: Will the RFI help inform the first round of funding in the summer?

ERIC BRITTON: Yes, this RFI has been structured to inform the entire Energy Resilience Fund.

WHITNEY BELL: The next one is, how is the study effort coordinated with the integrated resource plan developed by the Puerto Rico Energy Board?



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ERIC BRITTON: So in general, DOE is going to have to collaborate closely with the Puerto Rico Energy Bureau to ensure that the investments designed under this program are being considered in line with Puerto Rico's public energy policy, Act 17 and others, and the planned investments of the electric utility, another area for close coordination as we develop this program. Thank you for bringing that up.

WHITNEY BELL: Can community leaders be a part of the RFI process?

ERIC BRITTON: So as a first step, I'd recommend organizing joint responses to this RFI that reflects you know, the priorities of your community or your constituency, and from there as a second step, I recommend you stay engaged on any future announcements, future developments to this program, where community groups, nonprofits, NGOs, and other local organizations can participate or apply for any future solicitations.

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WHITNEY BELL: All right, will substation modernization be a focus?

ERIC BRITTON: Substation modernization. There is a big allocation from the FEMA recovery funds going towards substation repairs and modernization and hazard mitigation. But you bring up a good point about coordination across agencies. We need to look at all of the possible planned investments in the broader context of other federal programs, and design ours to not duplicate efforts and to fill in gaps where we can, so.

WHITNEY BELL: Does this program get USBI covered?

ERIC BRITTON: No, it does not. This fund is exclusively for Puerto Rico, per other congressional language.

WHITNEY BELL: Sorry, I'm moving around here. OK, can National Laboratory personnel contribute to feedback in the RFI?

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ERIC BRITTON: Yes, we encourage all interested parties to participate. No matter what sector you're coming from, the RFI is open to everyone.

WHITNEY BELL: Can the program be designed to minimize the potential for waste, fraud, and abuse?

ERIC BRITTON: Yes, being good stewards of public monies is something that's extremely important. So we're committed to designing programs with sufficient controls in place, so stringent due diligence and auditing, and, you know, through execution of the programs, ongoing monitoring and evaluation. So we're certainly integrating these precautions into our program designs and we can share more, we can share more this summer.

WHITNEY BELL: Will you be conducting public events with LMI communities that have limited access to technology, making it difficult to provide comments over e-mail to respond to the RFI?

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ERIC BRITTON: Yes, we've conducted some community events on the eastern half of the islands a couple months back and actually next week we'll be doing similar community events on the western side of the islands. We are also conducting roundtable discussions to allow a different forum for others to submit verbal responses to the questions in the RFI.

WHITNEY BELL: What solutions are you contemplating to not increase the cost of energy for recipient?

ERIC BRITTON: So we're very aware that any solution, solutions contemplated should not increase the energy burden of low income Puerto Ricans. So while, again, we don't have details to share at this time, I just want to communicate that reducing the burden of high electricity bills is certainly a concern we're keeping top of mind.

WHITNEY BELL: Do you have more details on the methodology to identify disadvantaged communities of

energy justice and how, quote-unquote, "energy burden will be characterized in Puerto Rico context?"

ERIC BRITTON: So DOE and other federal agencies have various definitions and thresholds to identify disadvantaged communities, but through this RFI process, we're hoping to gain insight into how Puerto Rican realities might call for a change to those definitions, or to those thresholds. So the question is, what about Puerto Rico is unique that we need to consider, as we choose definitions and thresholds for qualification to different programs and things of that nature?

WHITNEY BELL: Great. So the questions that we just went through are the questions that were submitted when you all registered. We appreciate you doing that. That brings us to the end of those questions. Any questions that you guys have submitted today, we are going to go through and we will use them to inform our FAQ. So thank you, Eric, and thank you to everyone for all your excellent questions prior to

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the webinar and then the questions you were submitting now.

This does wrap up today's webinar. So a copy of today's slides will be available on the Puerto Rico Energy Resilience Fund webinar's webpage. Several people have asked for that today, so I'm going to work to get that up by the end of the day today. So by 5:00 PM Eastern Time, those slides should be up and you can go to that link that's now in the chat here. Also, a recording of today's webinar will be available in about two weeks on that same webpage. And then I think if you go to the next slide, it should have the final, thank you, there.

So to find more information about the Puerto Rico Energy Resilience Fund RFI, please visit the program webpage. You can find that link here in the chat now as well. Thank you to Agustín and to Eric and all of our attendees for attending today. Take care everyone and we will see you next time.

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ERIC BRITTON: Thank you so much. Thank you everyone for  
joining us.

AGUSTÍN CARBÓ: Thank you everyone.

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