

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY  
OFFICE OF ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND RENEWABLE ENERGY  
NEPA DETERMINATION**



**RECIPIENT:** The University of Texas at El Paso

**STATE:** TX

**PROJECT TITLE:** Metal-Organic Framework-Based Heterostructure Electrocatalysts with Tailored Electron Density Distribution for Cost-Effective and Durable Fuel Cells and Electrolyzers

<b>Funding Opportunity Announcement Number</b>	<b>Procurement Instrument Number</b>	<b>NEPA Control Number</b>	<b>CID Number</b>
DE-FOA-0002598	DE-EE0010431	GFO-0010431-001	GO10431

**Based on my review of the information concerning the proposed action, as NEPA Compliance Officer (authorized under DOE Policy 451.1), I have made the following determination:**

**CX, EA, EIS APPENDIX AND NUMBER:**

Description:

**A9 Information gathering, analysis, and dissemination**

Information gathering (including, but not limited to, literature surveys, inventories, site visits, and audits), data analysis (including, but not limited to, computer modeling), document preparation (including, but not limited to, conceptual design, feasibility studies, and analytical energy supply and demand studies), and information dissemination (including, but not limited to, document publication and distribution, and classroom training and informational programs), but not including site characterization or environmental monitoring. (See also B3.1 of appendix B to this subpart.)

**B3.6 Small-scale research and development, laboratory operations, and pilot projects**

Siting, construction, modification, operation, and decommissioning of facilities for smallscale research and development projects; conventional laboratory operations (such as preparation of chemical standards and sample analysis); and small-scale pilot projects (generally less than 2 years) frequently conducted to verify a concept before demonstration actions, provided that construction or modification would be within or contiguous to a previously disturbed or developed area (where active utilities and currently used roads are readily accessible). Not included in this category are demonstration actions, meaning actions that are undertaken at a scale to show whether a technology would be viable on a larger scale and suitable for commercial deployment.

**B3.15 Small-scale indoor research and development projects using nanoscale materials**

Siting, construction, modification, operation, and decommissioning of facilities for indoor small-scale research and development projects and small-scale pilot projects using nanoscale materials in accordance with applicable requirements (such as engineering, worker safety, procedural, and administrative regulations) necessary to ensure the containment of any hazardous materials. Construction and modification activities would be within or contiguous to a previously disturbed or developed area (where active utilities and currently used roads are readily accessible).

Rationale for determination:

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) is proposing to provide funding to the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) to synthesize platinum group metal (PGM)-free metal-organic frameworks (MOFs) and MOF-based heterostructures via a hydrothermal strategy herein referred to as catalysts. Award activities aim to achieve the synthesis of cost-competitive catalysts that exhibit exceptional oxygen evolution and oxygen reduction reaction (OER & ORR) activity and stability in fuel cells.

Award activities would focus primarily on the synthesis, characterization, and testing of catalysts. The types of activities associated with the award would include data analysis, computer modeling, preliminary engineering/design, and laboratory research. The award would consist of two Budget Periods (BPs). BP1 would focus on the design of a project management plan and laboratory synthesis of the catalysts. Microscopic, spectroscopic, and electrochemical techniques to evaluate the structural, chemical, and electrochemical OER/ORR properties of the catalysts; testing of the catalysts within fuel cells, electrolyzers, and alkaline reversible fuel cells; theoretical analysis via computational methods; and the development of an advanced analytical chemistry course at UTEP would be performed in BP2.

Synthesis of MOFs and MOF-based heterostructures, electrochemical OER/ORR analysis, fuel cell and electrolyzer testing, and theoretical analysis of catalysts would occur on UTEP's campus (El Paso, TX). The University of Puerto Rico at Cayey (UPRC) would perform computational work via Linux servers and data analysis activities (Cayey, PR). UTEP would utilize Cornell High Energy Synchrotron Source's (CHESS) laboratory facility to perform X-ray absorption spectroscopy measurements. Reversible fuel cell testing would occur within ElectroCat Consortium facilities at the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL; Los Alamos, NM). Project work would be performed at pre-existing facilities that are purpose-built to accommodate the type of laboratory work and testing to be conducted for this award. Facility modifications would be not required.

Award activities would involve handling and use of hazardous materials, including (chemical reagents, industrial

solvents, and nanomaterials). Handling, storage, and disposal of such materials would occur within controlled settings at UTEP and would follow existing policies and procedures. All nanoscale materials would be handled using proper engineering controls until adhered to surface materials or dissolved in solvents. Existing university health, safety, and environmental policies and procedures would be followed at all facilities, including personnel training, proper personal protective equipment (PPE), engineering controls, monitoring, and internal assessments. UTEP would observe all applicable federal, state, and local health, safety, and environmental regulations.

DOE has considered the scale, duration, and nature of proposed activities to determine potential impacts on resources, including those of an ecological, historical, cultural, and socioeconomic nature. DOE does not anticipate impacts on these resources which would be considered significant or require DOE to consult with other agencies or stakeholders. A diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) plan would be implemented to encourage the inclusion of individuals from underrepresented groups in fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

Any work proposed to be conducted at a federal facility may be subject to additional NEPA review by the cognizant federal official and must meet the applicable health and safety requirements of the facility.

## NEPA PROVISION

DOE has made a final NEPA determination.

Notes:

Hydrogen and Fuel Cell Technologies Office (HFTO)  
NEPA review completed by Corrin MacLuckie, 04/18/2023

## FOR CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION DETERMINATIONS

The proposed action (or the part of the proposal defined in the Rationale above) fits within a class of actions that is listed in Appendix A or B to 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D. To fit within the classes of actions listed in 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D, Appendix B, a proposal must be one that would not: (1) threaten a violation of applicable statutory, regulatory, or permit requirements for environment, safety, and health, or similar requirements of DOE or Executive Orders; (2) require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators), but the proposal may include categorically excluded waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment actions or facilities; (3) disturb hazardous substances, pollutants, contaminants, or CERCLA-excluded petroleum and natural gas products that preexist in the environment such that there would be uncontrolled or unpermitted releases; (4) have the potential to cause significant impacts on environmentally sensitive resources, including, but not limited to, those listed in paragraph B(4) of 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D, Appendix B; (5) involve genetically engineered organisms, synthetic biology, governmentally designated noxious weeds, or invasive species, unless the proposed activity would be contained or confined in a manner designed and operated to prevent unauthorized release into the environment and conducted in accordance with applicable requirements, such as those listed in paragraph B(5) of 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D, Appendix B.

There are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal.

The proposed action has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion. This proposal is not connected to other actions with potentially significant impacts (40 CFR 1508.25(a)(1)), is not related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(7)), and is not precluded by 40 CFR 1506.1 or 10 CFR 1021.211 concerning limitations on actions during preparation of an environmental impact statement.

The proposed action is categorically excluded from further NEPA review.

## SIGNATURE OF THIS MEMORANDUM CONSTITUTES A RECORD OF THIS DECISION.

NEPA Compliance Officer Signature:



Casey Strickland

NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: 4/18/2023

## FIELD OFFICE MANAGER DETERMINATION

- Field Office Manager review not required
- Field Office Manager review required

**BASED ON MY REVIEW I CONCUR WITH THE DETERMINATION OF THE NCO :**

Field Office Manager's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
Field Office Manager

Date: \_\_\_\_\_