



National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Determination Programmatic Categorical Exclusion

Recipient:	Multiple
State:	Multiple
Project Title:	Energizing Rural Communities Phase 2: Partner Track
OCED NEPA Control Number:	OCED-ERC Phase 2 Partner-001-CX

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:

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION APPENDIX, NUMBER, AND 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.)

Rationale for Determination: The \$15 million Energizing Rural Communities (ERC) Prize challenges individuals and organizations to develop partnership plans (the partner track) or innovative financing strategies (the finance track) to help rural or remote communities improve their energy systems and advance clean energy demonstration projects. This prize is part of the \$1 billion Energy Improvements in Rural or Remote Areas (ERA) Program, created by the U.S. Department of Energy’s Office of Clean Energy Demonstrations (OCED). The ERA Program supports projects that improve the resilience, reliability, safety, availability, and environmental performance of energy systems in rural or remote areas of the U.S. with populations of no more than 10,000 people. The application period for Phase 2 of the ERC prize closed in July 2024.

A programmatic NEPA document is a broad-scope NEPA document that identifies and assesses the environmental impacts of a DOE program including routine, ongoing and reoccurring activities. Categorical exclusions listed in Appendix A to Subpart D of DOE’s NEPA Implementing Regulations are defined as general agency actions.

DOE has prepared a programmatic CX determination to cover the activities proposed by applicants to partner track of the ERC Prize. The partner track—with a \$10 million cash prize pool—will support

funding, technical assistance, or a network of partners that can help implement clean energy demonstration projects. DOE has reviewed the partner track applications and has determined that those activities proposed would be covered by this CX determination. Those activities would include but are not limited to: conducting feasibility studies, gathering information, completing community outreach and developing partnerships, doing energy audits and inventories of rural and remote communities, completing engineering designs, and providing workforce and community training opportunities.

DOE has considered potential impacts on resources, including those of an ecological, historical, and cultural nature. DOE does not anticipate adverse impacts to any sensitive resources because of the proposed activities.

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 1501.9(e)(1)), is not related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts (40 CFR 1508.1(g)(3)) 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.

DOE has determined that work to be carried out outside of the United States, its territories and possessions is exempt from further review pursuant to Section 5.1.1 of the DOE Final Guidelines for Implementation of Executive Order 12114; "Environmental Effects Abroad of Major Federal Actions."

The proposed action is categorically excluded from further NEPA review.

A portion of the proposed action is categorically excluded from further NEPA review.

Notes: This categorical exclusion applies to those activities associated with the ERC Prize Phase 2 partner track and does not authorize any construction related activities including site characterization and environmental monitoring. Any changes to the project activities or location are subject to additional NEPA review by DOE and are not authorized for federal funding unless and until the Contracting Officer provides written authorization on those additions or modifications.

SIGNATURE OF THIS MEMORANDUM CONSTITUTES A RECORD OF THIS DECISION.

OCD NEPA Compliance Officer Signature:

Date: