2025 Cleantech RFP

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers
Note: These include questions asked during informational Webinar on 9.15.21

Is there a template for the projects that you're sourcing from us?

There is no written template, but we have identified the clear sections in which we want proposals to include within the RFP. We are also sharing the factors in which proposals will be evaluated within the RFP. What we're looking for is a basic 3-6 page memo, which addresses these areas, at this current phase.

Will you share a recording of this presentation?

Yes, a recording of this presentation and a list of questions and answers will be available at 2025CleanTech.com. Interested organizations can also book time for 1-1 office hours about projects and questions at the same location.

Are you looking for only one project for proposal? Is it possible to include multiple concepts / projects in one proposal?

A group can only submit one project per proposal, but that project can certainly contain multiple components from different organizations. Institutions/organizations are welcome to submit more than one proposal in response to this RFP.

We will ultimately select, by way of a selection committee, 8 distinct projects that we will weave into this consortium for ultimate submittal to the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA). It's feasible that an institution or organization can end up being selected for more than one of these projects after submitting different proposals. This would depend on whether those proposals were scored highly and deemed most impactful and feasible through the selection process based on the criteria outlined in the RFP.

We do want to emphasize that one of the criteria for the ultimate consortium proposal submitted to the EDA is the connectivity and interconnectedness of different projects. It will be helpful for organizations and collaborations responding to this RFP refer to any potential aligned projects in their project narrative.

Is there an ideal team composition (i.e. universities vs. nonprofit vs. national lab vs. community organizer)?

The key consideration here is to address the criteria in the RFP. These are criteria that EDA will use to evaluate the larger proposal ultimately submitted by this consortium. It will be difficult to address enough of that criterion if a project includes just a university, or just a lab, or just a community organization. The most competitive projects will include collaboration across groups.

Do you need to be from the Chicagoland area for a proposal or will within the State of Illinois suffice?

We are looking for projects from across the State of Illinois. We will be more competitive if our ultimate coalition reaches across a wide range of areas.

One thing that will make us competitive and enable the coalition to ask for maximum funding is if coal-impacted economies are included. We encourage projects from those areas and are looking to source and evaluate projects from the southern part of the State, as well.

What scope should the problem statement address (i.e. Illinois, Midwest, U.S., Global)?

We are looking for all sizes. Some projects will be locally focused, others we expect to be Illinois-focused, and some may bring in partners from other states. We want to take a wholistic approach and not only look at technology, but workforce and inclusive innovation. We are aiming to make sure that everyone comes to the table and gets their voices and ideas heard and considered.

This is an opportunity for our region to lead for a global problem. We have the resources and regional strengths to lead here, lean in here, and demonstrate what the future of technology can do to solve ills of the climate impact that we face every day.

In the evaluation criteria for proposals regarding alignment on industry verticals, do you think of "cleantech" generally or more specific to identified verticals (i.e. hydrogen, cybersecurity, etc.)?

We have to do some narrowing, so proposals need to align around clean energy and transportation and the verticals that we identified. These are areas where we saw the most equitable impact and biggest growth opportunities, while also leveraging our competitive advantages in the region.

Can you expand on what is meant by the horizontal capabilities? For example, how might an artificial intelligence startup engage with this RFP? Would they need to come together with a nonprofit, lab or university lead?

Ultimately, you have to be an 'eligible entity' to apply. That includes nonprofit, public/private, universities, Native American tribes, and government institutions; but a collaborative proposal could include the private sector and startups around them.

For example, if a nonprofit or university were considering submitting a project related to microgrids, there could be a startup with technology in cybersecurity that could inform a component of that project.

Can you give more clarification or speak about the acceptable budget ranges and level of detail?

According to the EDA Notice of Funding Opportunity, project sizes can be between $750,000 and $25 million. There is a basic template in our RFP which shows the level of detail we are looking for underneath this RFP to source projects for inclusion in our larger regional proposal.

As we get proposals, we may see separate projects that come in and have the potential to be integrated. We will try to connect these groups and combine smaller projects to create a larger impact.

Is it possible to have a budget less than $750,000?

Yes, if the submitting group is open to their project being connected with a larger group. We will not be able to select a project with a budget of less than $750,000 as a standalone project – but we may be able to connect with other larger efforts if it is aligned and compelling.

If an organization has a project with a scope smaller than $750,000, we encourage them to come to office hours or email RFP@2025CleanTech.com to discuss the project, and we talk about it very specifically and perhaps connect to others in the ecosystem who can help support the effort.

Does your team have priority sites that you'd like developed and submitted as a part of this RFP?

No, we do not have priority sites identified.

Are we looking for individual proposals that meet all the criteria the EDA is looking for, or just some?

We are looking at projects that hit more than one criterion. It is our goal to submit a proposal with projects that hit a combination of all the criteria, but an individual project response to this RFP does not need to hit all.

If an organization or collaboration responding to this RFP knows that it is deficient in one or multiple criteria, it is best to outline that and point to need. This will give us a better opportunity to help you find what you need and identify other projects submitted to put together a better effort.

With the expected 9/30/2022 Phase 2 award date, when would you expect work under this effort to begin?

That is the latest the EDA notes it will give notice. We expect notice to come anywhere between June – September of 2022. Projects will probably begin during the second half of 2022 at the earliest, and more likely in 2023.

Will mHUB and UChicago help facilitate potential collaboration between groups?

We will do our best. The timeline is very tight. So, we encourage groups across the state to identify collaborators as part of exploration in responding to this RFP. We will do everything we can to connect as well, but we are all working on a tight timeline. Help us as much as possible – the more we help each other, the more likely we are to be invited by the EDA for the full proposal.

How much detail would you like to see from a funding perspective (i.e. current, future, pledges, support letters, etc.?

It all goes back to building sustainability, so the future piece is important. It is also imperative that the budget is clear around the project that you're proposing. Groups have 6 pages, so we ask for as much as you can give us in that limit; but please do not submit more than 6 pages.

Are projects that focus on Illinois, but benefit stakeholders outside of Illinois, eligible or do the benefits need to accrue exclusively to Illinois?

No, efforts that help more people are welcome.

Are there plans for "matching sessions" where interested team members can meet other people for the proposal

We will not be able to facilitate that in this tight timeline, but we will do our best to connect groups who come to us through office hours or ultimately submit a proposal if they align with others.

Are you looking for inclusivity to be part of the actual solution, or simply in the makeup of the organization?

It can be both. Having an inclusive team is fantastic. Solutions that affect wide communities are also fantastic. We are looking for inclusivity and equity in all forms.

How does quantum hardware fit in the overall picture? Does the project need to justify being under cleantech or can we take it as a given, with the QC applications being the reason why it would be under infrastructure / cleantech?

Clearly, un-hackable communications are an important piece of new transportation systems and power grids that have to be secure and resilient. By the same token, there are other areas within the verticals that are not highlighted – like solar. If an organization submitted projects aligned to cleantech but outside of the verticals, we would certainly consider it.

Is there a budget minimum / maximum for Phase 1?

The budget minimum is $750,000 and maximum is $25 million for individual projects. 6-8 will be selected for inclusion in this coalition's ultimate proposal to the EDA.

How do we attend office hours? Is there a zoom link?

Groups can visit 2025CleanTech.com for details and instructions to sign up.

Are pre-seed level startups with a goal to utilize the funding to grow, allowed to take part in the proposal?

No private sector entity can lead a project, but startup technologies can surround a proposal. And commercialization of startups can be the focus of a project.

Can the 20% cost-sharing be in kind (like employee time)?

Yes, there can be some in-kind. It should be a mixture of employee time, corporate contributions, corporate in-kind, government, etc. The EDA classification for cost-sharing can be found on the EDA site.

Is Argonne National Lab playing a fundamental role in this? Can one team with Argonne National Lab scientists?
Yes, organizations can team with any organization including national labs. By all means, find the experts where you can. Groups should reach out directly.

How long is the implementation period for Phase 2?

The EDA outlines in the NOFO that this should be immediately impactful. If it's a program, we should assume we're deploying the investment over a 24-month period. The EDA does give flexibility if the project is or includes construction, extending to a 48-month performance cycle. Our collective goal should be to drive impact as quickly as possible.

How can startups participate?

Part of what this effort is working to do is to drive immediate impact. The EDA wants to create a virtuous cycle of economic impact. This is not a typical grant; it is about jobs and revenue creation for the region. Startups are an engine of that and will need to be plugged directly into projects. They are the leaders that will create those jobs, attract investment, generate revenue and commercialize cutting-edge technologies in the industry verticals identified. Whether you're an early idea or a larger startup – we need your engagement in this effort.

Note, however, that no private sector entity can lead a project, but startup technologies can surround a proposal. And commercialization of startups can be the focus of a project.

There are a few required items (like demonstrated public sector support for a non-profit or a feasibility study for an incubator) – these would be required in Phase 2, not for this Sept 16 deadline, is that right?

It is required for Phase 2. We are going to want to see public support. mHUB and UChicago are going to work to solicit public support for 6-8 projects included in the ultimate proposal, so we can be a partner in that.

In an ideal world, there's already been a feasibility study that's been created for organizations/projects – both on the business and real estate side. This ensures that it's a strong proposal.

We anticipate that this RFP for projects to be included in the ultimate consortium proposal to the EDA will be competitive. We can only select 8 projects to be included in the ultimate proposal, so we encourage organizations to include as much information on feasibility and sustainability as possible in their response to this RFP.

What is the plan for future administration of this consortium? Will projects be physically housed at mHUB or UChicago? What does administration look like?

Projects will not need to be housed at either of the co-lead organizations. Some projects don't need to even relate to mHUB or University of Chicago. We are working to build a strong consortium around the selected 6-8 projects. There could projects from any area of the region.

The EDA does want one distinct lead organization that is administering the grant from the perspective of funds, reporting, ensuring milestones are being hit, etc. There will be an institution that administers the overall consortium, but then some of that individual responsibility is also put on the project leads themselves. For example, if a project says it will spend $25 million executing against a deliverable, there will be fiduciary responsibility leveraging those dollars to achieve those outcomes exactly aligned to the ultimate proposal.

The lead institution is there to help guide and select, as well as help intertwine and ensure that all 8 projects are driving together. It's a team effort to administer.

Does the budget total include the cost share?

It does not. That would be on top. It would include indirect cost rates, though. For an example, a $25 million budget would include the project costs and the indirect costs.

Is there room for clean tech assessment? (i.e. research proving that hydrogen fuel cells are or are not clean)?

This is not an applied research grant. Assessments are great and can be incorporated, but the project should also include impact and be aligned to the criteria laid out by the EDA. Applied research is not the primary focus of this grant.

Can the construction already be underway?

Yes, but the EDA will only fund expansion or new building efforts that will take place during the implementation period.

You mentioned letters of support from entities. Are those required for Phase 1 or Phase 2?

We would like as many letters of support as possible in this phase.

Can research ideas be submitted?

Research ideas would need to be on the translation side. So, looking at TRL levels 7, 8, and 9. These would need to be about commercialization and not technology readiness.

Can startups submit their ideas as a proposal?

Startups can participate as we select projects and are essential, but they are not a fundable entity as outlined by the EDA.

Page limit for the Narrative as per the RFP received is 6, in this presentation it says 5. Which is correct?

Refer to the RFP. The limit is 6 pages.

Will evaluators on the selection committee sign NDAs?

Yes, they will, and proposals will be kept confidential.