



Community Benefit Plans in Carbon Management Funding Announcement Opportunities

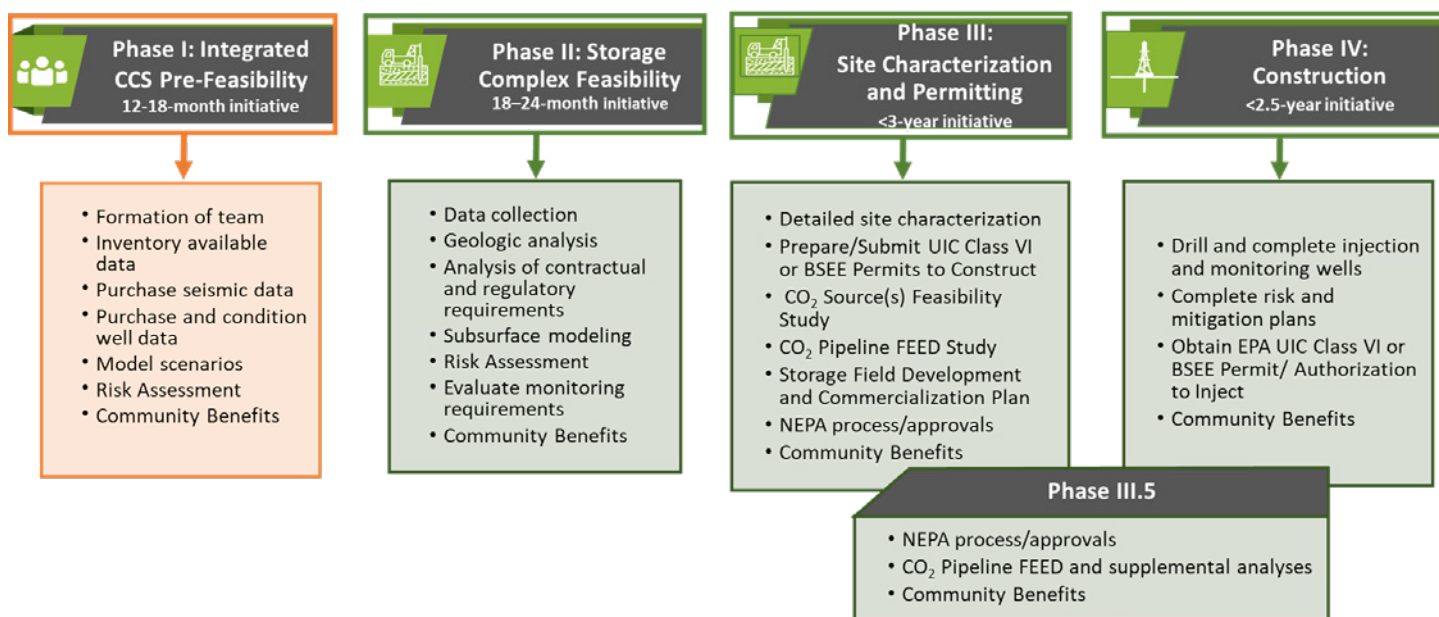
Frequently Asked Questions:

The Office of Fossil Energy and Carbon Management's (FECM) mission is to facilitate a just and environmentally sustainable transition toward a net-zero carbon economy. How do we do this? One approach is through focusing on carbon dioxide – its storage, containment, and capture. Through this approach, we address emissions associated with the power and industrial sectors, as well as legacy emissions in the atmosphere. We also seek to permanently store and/or convert carbon dioxide (CO₂) to reduce negative climate impacts. Activities to deliver on the Office's mission center on investments in technological readiness and analysis.

1. How are the Office of Carbon Management's projects designed? How does this approach promote engagement with community and labor stakeholders prior to construction?

FECM plans and funds the implementation of large-scale field projects for carbon dioxide removal (CDR) and carbon capture, utilization, and storage (CCUS). These large-scale projects are often implemented using a phased approach. This approach allows projects to address specific knowledge gaps and to improve understanding of the development of a project from the feasibility study through construction. Examples of the phased approach include the [Regional Direct Air Capture Hubs](#) and [Carbon Storage Assurance Facility Enterprise \(CarbonSAFE\) Initiative](#), which use a multi-phased approach to develop carbon storage infrastructure projects (Figure 1). Projects apply based on the readiness of the project to a specific phase: Pre-feasibility, Storage Complex Feasibility, Site Characterization and Permitting, and Construction.

Figure 1. The CarbonSAFE Initiative is a methodical approach to develop carbon storage infrastructure projects.



Projects are required to develop [Community Benefits Plans \(CBPs\)](#) that describe the project’s knowledge gaps related to community context and workforce needs, approach to early and continuous engagement with community and labor stakeholders, and commitments to ensure high-quality jobs and a diverse workforce. CBPs are required for each phase to ensure that effective community engagement occurs early and throughout the life of the project. Using CarbonSAFE as an example, construction does not occur until Phase IV, but community engagement will occur during the earlier phases ensuring appropriate community engagement prior to construction or ground-breaking.

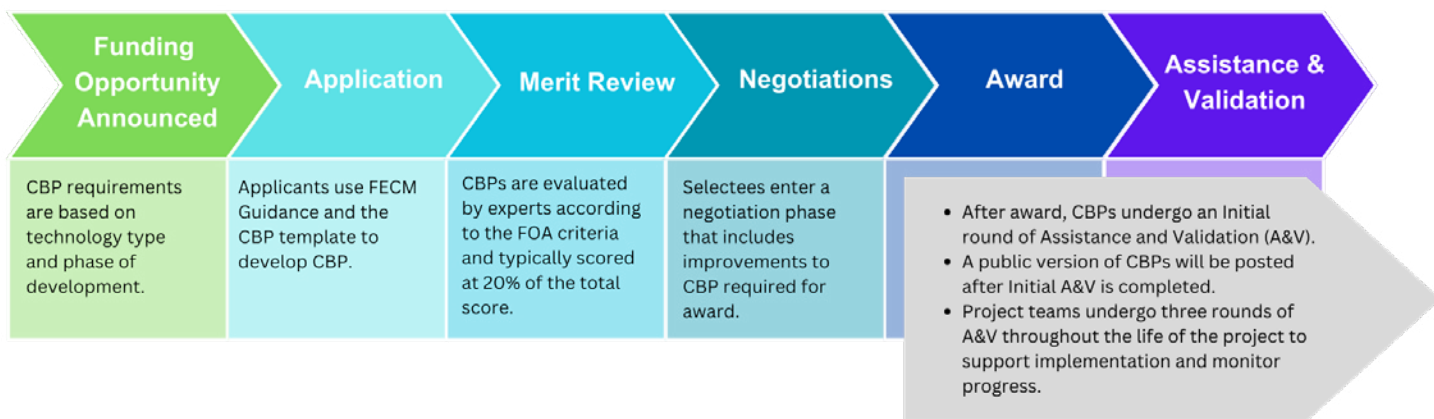
2. What is a Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA)?

FOAs are publicly available documents used by FECM that contain the official information about Federal financial assistance (e.g., cooperative agreements, grants, loans), including goals, deadlines, eligibility, and reporting. Using FOAs, Federal grant-making agencies announce financial assistance availability and provide instructions on how to apply. This process is a competitive process that evaluates proposals and selects projects that meet technical, equity, and sustainability requirements for commercialization. FECM goals are to improve performance, reduce costs, and scale the deployment of the technologies to decarbonize the power and industrial sectors and to remove CO₂ from the atmosphere.

3. How are CBPs evaluated in Office of Carbon Management’s FOA process?

The Department of Energy has a long-standing process for issuing FOAs, soliciting, and selecting projects. The CBP requirements are described in the FOA and are evaluated alongside engineering, technical, and budget materials. How the CBPs are evaluated and implemented in the FOA process is illustrated in Figure 2 and consists of the steps outlined below:

Figure 2. Office of Carbon Management’s CBP Evaluation Process



1. FOA Issued

CBP requirements are based on the technology type, phase of development, and are detailed in the FOA.

2. Applicant Submits Application

Applicants are provided a CBP template and guidance for developing plans for [Community and Labor Engagement](#), [Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility](#), and [Justice 40 Initiative](#). Also found on FECM’s website [here](#).

3. Applications Undergo Merit Review

The merit review process includes a review of eligibility and a thorough technical review by experts in the subject matter of the funding opportunity. For large-scale projects, FECM recruits external reviewers with subject matter expertise and/or practitioner experience in equity, justice, jobs, and community engagement to review and evaluate Community Benefit Plans. Apply to be an external reviewer [here](#).

4. Applications are Selected and Negotiations Commence

The selection official considers the reviewers' recommendations, program policy factors as described in the published FOA, and the amount of funds available when selecting applications for negotiation of an award. Applicants are notified if they have been selected to negotiate an award. Negotiation involves discussing the final scope of work, project milestones, and budget. A notification of selection is not a commitment to provide funding. During negotiations, FECM works with selectees to improve their community benefits plans as needed.

5. Awards Issued by Program Office

When negotiations are satisfactorily complete and the DOE contracting officer approves the award, a start date is established, and the project work begins. Projects typically last from one year to five years, depending on the FOA and the negotiated scope of work and schedule.

Projects with multiple budget periods are initially funded for the first budget period, often for one year, with future budget periods contingent upon satisfactory performance and Go/No-Go decision review. At the Go/No-Go decision points, FECM/NETL evaluates project performance and other factors to decide whether to continue funding the project, recommend redirection of work under the project, place a hold on federal funding for the project, or discontinue funding the project. The Go/No-Go decision criteria are described in the approved scope of work (Statements of Project Objectives). This active project management ensures projects reach their intended objectives, helping to protect taxpayer dollars.

6. Assistance and Validation Process

The Office of Carbon Management is implementing a new process called Assistance and Validation (A&V) to support implementation and monitor progress of Community Benefit Plans. The A&V process involves three reviews throughout the project period including an initial review within approximately 90 days of project award, an interim review, and a final review toward the end of the project.

All A&V steps are performed by an A&V team comprised of non-conflicted DOE National Laboratory personnel and/or external third party non-conflicted validators.

1. **Initial A&V:** The Project Team provides information and data to support the claims within the CBP award document. The A&V team validates required CBP Plans, performance metrics, baseline, and targets as proposed in the award document and establish a framework to evaluate and track progress over time.
2. **Interim A&V:** The A&V Team evaluates CBP progress on plan implementation, identifies best practices, and considers plan modifications to deliver best outcomes.
3. **Final A&V:** A final validation meeting will review CBP implementation and result in a public A&V Summary Report.

4. What is the difference between projects that have been “selected” and “awarded”?

A project that has been announced as “selected” means that it has been selected to proceed to negotiation for award, which involves a discussion of the final scope of work, project milestones, and budget. A notification of selection for award negotiations is not a commitment to provide funding.

A project is awarded after negotiations are satisfactorily complete and the DOE contracting officer approves the award, and a start date is established. Following award, the project work begins.

5. Why are certain stages of the FOA process confidential?

Pursuant to the DOE Merit Review Guide for Financial Assistance, information and materials provided in applications are submitted to DOE for the purpose of application evaluation and may contain trade secrets and/or other privileged or confidential commercial or financial information. All materials, communications, and work documents pertinent to the applications received and the review of these applications are privileged, pre-decisional communications and documents that are to be used only by DOE staff and the Merit Review Panel(s). Further, application information and materials and the details of the application evaluation and selection are kept confidential to protect the integrity of the evaluation and selection process and to ensure there is no undue outside influence. Similarly, the negotiations process is kept confidential to protect confidential business and financial information provided by the selectee and to ensure there is no undue outside influence.

6. Will FECM make DOE-funded projects' CBPs available to the public? Where can I find them?

Yes, a public version of a DOE-funded project's CBP will be developed by the Project Team by the end of the initial A&V process which is targeted for completion within 90-days of award. The public version of the CBP will be posted to the project landing page on the [NETL website](#).

7. If a community member has questions about a project or CBP, where should they go for more information?

If a project has been awarded, they can reach out to the Principal Investigator contact listed on the NETL project landing page available [here](#).