GRIP Community Benefits Plans Training for Second Round Applicants Transcript 03/05/24

WHITNEY BELL: Hello, and welcome to the Grid Resilience and Innovation Partnerships Program, also known as GRIP, Community Benefits Plan Requirements and Best Practices webinar. I'm Whitney Bell with ICF, and I will be your host today.

First, I have a few housekeeping items for today's webinar. This Webex meeting is being recorded and may be used by the US 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 a video connection, you are presumed consent to recording and use of your voice or image. All participants are in listen-only mode. If you have any technical issues or questions, you may type them into the chat box and select Send to Host. And if you need to view the live captioning, please refer to the link that will appear in the chat now.

Following today's presentation, we will address some of the most commonly asked questions we've received through the registration process. Feel free to continue to submit any additional questions in the chat box during today's presentation as we may use those to update the online GRIP program FAQ.

Now a brief notice for today's webinar. None of the information presented herein is legally binding. The content included in this presentation is intended for informational purposes only relating to the funding opportunity announcement or FOA DE-FOA-0003195.

Any content within this presentation that appears discrepant from the FOA language is superseded by the FOA language. All applicants are encouraged to carefully read the FOA guidelines and adhere to them. The purpose of the webinar is to provide an overview of the community benefits plan requirements. It is critical that applicants write their applications based on the detailed information in the FOA.

Finally, a copy of today's slides will be available on the community benefits plans training for GRIP program second round applicants web page by this coming Friday. And the recording will be available on the same page in about two weeks. We will send you an email when that is available, so you'll be able to log back on and refer back to it. And there is a link in the chat that will go to that page if you want to save that now.

All right. With those announcements out of the way, let's go ahead and get started. Today, we'll hear from Colin Meehan, the GRIP Program Manager with the Grid Deployment Office to provide an overview of the GRIP program. So Colin, welcome.

COLIN MEEHAN: Thank you, Whitney, and thank you all for being here. If we could move ahead to the next slide, I'll talk a little bit about the agenda. As I think you all know, the community benefits plan and community benefits are an integral part of the GRIP program.

We take this very seriously, and as I and my colleague Elizabeth will talk through today, it has been informative for our selections in the first round, and we are really encouraging everyone who is considering applying in this second funding cycle to pay close attention to in particular what Elizabeth is going to say to you today, and to the needs of the community benefits plans. So for today, I'm going to provide a quick overview, a reminder of some of the elements of the program as it relates to community

benefits. And then I'll hand it over to my colleague Elizabeth, who's been leading our community benefits work throughout the GRIP program.

She will walk you through what community benefits are and what our goals as a program are for community benefits related to grid resilience and innovation, and then also through the community benefits plan template, which is a little bit updated from what you saw last year if you applied last year. Finally in the discussion, I'm going to walk you through a few of the more detailed insights from what we saw in the last funding cycle that could inform community benefits planning in this current application cycle. And as Whitney indicated, at the end of the program, Elizabeth and I will answer some of the most commonly received questions. So with that, can we move on to the next slide, please?

So as a reminder to everyone, the GRIP program has three program goals that are overarching across all three topic areas. And those goals are to transform the US electric grid, to do so in a way that supports and emphasizes energy justice, and in doing so catalyze and leverage capital. We have a tremendous program here with $10.5 billion in funding for the transmission and distribution grid, but we know that's not nearly enough to have the impact that we want to to ensure that we have a just transition into a clean energy economy.

As a reminder, applications are due for Topic areas one and three on April 17. And for topic area two, they are due on May 22. And you can see the first three pages of the FOA will provide more information on important dates and deadlines for the GRIP applications. Can we move on to the next slide?

So just a really quick highlight on some program updates. Concept papers were submitted on January 12. And if you did submit a concept paper, you should have received an encourage or discourage notification on February 29, so last Thursday, I believe that was. We reviewed 575 concept papers and we encouraged 65%, or 373 of those concept papers, to apply in the next round.

I do want to remind folks that whether you received an encourage or discourage notification, you are still eligible to apply. Simply by submitting a concept paper form, you are eligible to apply in this current funding round. And lastly, I want to encourage everyone to join our next webinar, which will be next week, and it will provide-- we will provide more information on the concept paper results and some important updates as applicants prepare for the full application period. That's going to be next Tuesday March, 12 at 3:30 PM.

So with that being said, if we could go to the next slide, I'll introduce my colleague Elizabeth O'Connell. She's been doing a fantastic job leading up our community benefits and energy and environmental justice work here at the GRIP program. So Elizabeth, please take it away.

ELIZABETH O'CONNELL: Thank you, Colin, and welcome everyone. Can we change to the next slide, please? I will be going over the community benefits priority goals, as well a few other elements of an effective CBP for each one of the priority goals that have been identified.

Additionally, I will discuss the different stages and documents associated with each stage. The goal here today is to provide information that is relevant for all of the potential applicants for this funding cycle. And on that note, I will go over the CBP template, which is more of the requirements, and summarize a few pointers for good practices. So let's dive in.

The community benefits plans-- and I'm going to call them CBPs from now on-- are component of the program application. The CBPs must demonstrate how they support the goal of building a clean and equitable energy economy by addressing the four areas of interest that you are seeing in your screen. Number one is to support meaningful community and labor engagement, invest in America's workforce,

advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, which I will call DEIA from this point on, with meaningful initiatives, and contribute to the president's goal that 40% of the overall benefits of certain federal investments flow to disadvantaged communities, what is also known as the Justice40 initiative. In terms of community and labor engagements, applicants must demonstrate that they have meaningful engagement with impacted communities and that such engagement is leading to concrete commitments or formal agreements in terms of quality jobs, quality, and manner in which the proposed project will create and/or retain high quality good paying jobs with a free and fair choice to join or form labor organizations. Also, the extent to which the project provides workforce opportunities in low and moderate income communities or communities that have lost jobs due to fossil energy displacement. Finally, extent to which the applicant has a plan to attract, train, and retain skilled workers and partner with key community-based labor and worker organizations and groups.

In terms of DIA, the applicant should demonstrate the quality and manner in which the proposed project incorporates DIA and accessibility-- as outlined in their CBP. Finally for Justice40 is the extent of which the project can meet or exceed the objectives of the Justice40 initiative, including how the project benefits disadvantaged or underserved communities, and/or partners with Tribal nations.

I want to note that the Justice40 goal is an administration-wide metric and is not project-specific. The goal for applicants is to demonstrate how their proposed project can help advance the overall objectives of the Justice40 initiative. Next slide, please.

So here's a summary, a few pointers that are good to remember when we're thinking about community benefits. The community benefits plan is a requirement, or CBP is a requirement of all bipartisan infrastructure law funding opportunity announcements. The CBP has a 20% value of the overall score of the application. And if your project is selected, the CBOO, or community benefits objectives and outcomes document, will be part of the award, and the recipient will be required to implement the proposed benefits and plan that was reflected in the CBP.

Also, during the life of the award, DOE will evaluate the recipients' progress as part of the go, no go review process as applicable. You will see across a presentation different sections of the FOA that you can go for reference of each one of the topics that we're addressing today. Next slide, please.

So now switching gears to discuss the different stages of the FOA process. The stages highlighted in this slide are just for this specific training and they're not all encompassing. So we start with-- the kickoff point is when the GRIP program issues the FOA. And then that's what we call the beginning of the concept paper stage. The applicant responsibility in that stage is to provide a concept paper submission that includes a summary of the community benefits that they're planning to propose.

Once that stage ends with the encourage and discourage letters from the GRIP program, the application stage will begin. And in that stage, the applicant has the responsibility or the task to develop a community benefits plan that will they will submit with their application. As you can see in the chart, we're right before the full application submission. Once the application submission is done, the GRIP program will go through a selection process and then we'll have an announcement for a pool of selectees. And that will kick start the negotiation stage.

During the negotiation stage, applicants and GRIP program will also work together to refine the community benefits outline and objectives, which will result in a final CBOO, that's the acronym for the community benefits outcome and objective document, which will be included with the award. Next slide, please.

So as I discussed in the community benefits roadmap, these are the different documents that applicants will produce on each stage of the process. The CBP is a document included in the application package and for which you must use the applicable template. The CBP is a requirement of the FOA and it will be evaluated along with other components of the application. As I said before, it represents 20% of the overall score.

The CBP includes a summary of milestones and objectives which will transform into the CBOO that will be used to document commitments to specific outcomes. Both CBP and CBOO will be reviewed and refined during the negotiation process if your project is selected. The summary milestone is a CBOO-- and we will return to these items throughout the presentation and it will provide more details and examples.

An important reminder is that the purpose of this training is to provide an overview of the community benefits plan requirements and a few examples for illustration purposes. Please refer to the FOA's applicable sections referenced on this slides for full CBP requirements. Next slide, please.

Moving on to the elements of an effective CBP, and I will go over the elements that you should be considering when you are preparing your applications for the GRIP program. In general, CBPs must demonstrate specific efforts that are part of the proposed project that will have meaningful, measurable, and specific impacts in the affected community. And in that sense, the benefits must be specific to your project, not company-wide goals and initiative. Please do not overly focus on previous efforts or accomplishments, as these are not demonstrative of benefits of this specific project.

Applicants are welcome to highlight prior or existing beneficial community engagements to provide context, but the emphasis should be on new or incremental actions they will be taking as part of their proposed project. Specific to the communities to your application impacts, another component is that it should incorporate community input, especially from historically underrepresented communities, into both project and community benefits planning process.

It should also include documentation that demonstrate the applicant's ability to achieve proposed CBP goals, labor agreements, community benefits agreements, letters of support, and it clearly demonstrates with the communities throughout all stages of the proposed project, including mechanisms to incorporate and address community feedback. Next slide, please.

Other components of, or elements of an effective CBP, are components that clearly demonstrate engagement with the communities throughout all stages of the proposed project, and also demonstrates that it facilitates community input, social buy-in, and accountability. Incorporates community input, and especially from historically underrepresented communities into both project and community benefits planning process.

An effective CBP indicates specific actions, objectives, and outcomes broken into specific commitments and tasks. Commitments to consider possible project impacts on impacted communities and workers labor, and workforce, and tribes to identify commitments aligned with the identified needs and priorities, ideally.

It also demonstrates a flow of benefits to disadvantaged communities, which doesn't mean that the project must be located in a disadvantaged community. It just means that the applicant will demonstrate that benefits will directly or indirectly impact such communities, and that the applicant will provide metrics to measure such effects or impacts.

It also includes smart milestones supported by metrics that will measure the success of the proposed actions. An effective CBP ensures that CBOO includes strong deliverables and smart milestones. Smart milestones should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely, and must demonstrate an achievement rather than simply completing a task. Ideally, the CBP will identify adequate resources, money, people, and time, to achieve the tasks outlined in the CBP. Next slide, please.

Now we will go more specifically over each one of the components of the CBP in terms of the community and in terms of the goals the specific priority goals, and I'll start with the community and labor engagement. An effective CBP will describe specific stakeholders such as organizations that support or work with disadvantaged communities, which I will refer to it as stats from now on.

It includes relevant supporting documentation received from stakeholders or other organizations that demonstrate project commitments. It also includes formal commitments to workforce and community agreements. The term "workforce" and community agreement includes a range of formal agreements between an applicant, impacted community groups, and relevant labor unions.

Workforce and community agreements are tools used in the project development and/or the execution to ensure that the benefits promised to communities and workers are realized. This could be an agreement specifying a project's commitment to the community, a collective bargaining agreement specifying wages, benefits, health, and safety standards, workforce, education, and training, and other terms of employment with a labor union, or it could include both community and workforce provisions.

A community benefits agreement is an agreement that is signed by the community groups or coalitions and a project developer identifying the community or labor benefits a developer agrees to deliver in return for community support or workforce availability of a project. A priority of the department is ensuring transmission and distribution operators that both serve tribes and receive DOE funds are meaningfully engaging tribes through community benefits agreements and other mechanisms.

I'm going to take a pause here to highlight that CBP does not fulfill tribal consultation requirements. Tribal consultation is a government to government process between DOE and the tribal government in recognition of tribal sovereignty. Tribes have a right to formal consultation with DOE if all of the following occur.

One, an Indian tribe could be impacted by a project. Two, the impacted Indian tribe is federally recognized. This includes Alaska, Native, regional, and village corporations. And three, the Indian tribe is not a party to the grant application or other relevant activity.

Also, submitting a letter that documents support from the tribe or involvement in a CBP does not determine whether a tribe is a party to an action. Please see applicable sections in the FOA for more information on the community and labor engagement. Next slide, please.

Now in terms of investing in quality jobs, an effective CBP will describe plans to negotiate project labor agreements as applicable, will highlight support from labor unions and specific commitments or agreements with those groups, will describe apprenticeship programs, and will demonstrate commitment to good jobs.

A good job is a job that provides fair, transparent, and equitable pay that exceeds the local average wage for an industry. It also delivers basic benefits, paid leave, health, insurance, retirement, or savings plans, access to affordable, reliable, and high quality child care, or long-term care for loved ones, and transportation. Those were a few examples.

It provides workers with an environment in which to have a collective voice, helps the employee develop the skills and experiences necessary to advance along a career path. It provides predictable scheduling and a safe, healthy, and accessible workplace devoid of hostility and harassment, has employees properly classified with the limited use of independent contractors and temporary workers, and protects workers' statutory rights for free and fair choice to join a union under the National Labor Relations Act. And finally, it explains specific commitments, like paying worker above average, or prevailing wages, and health and safety commitments. These are just examples that are for illustration purposes only. Please refer to FOA's applicable sections referenced on this slide for full CBP requirements. Next slide, please. Now in terms of DEIA, an effective CBP will provide specific plans to incorporate DEIA objectives into the project, such objectives should also be associated with or measured by smart milestones. Examples provided reflect key tools such as partnerships with community-based organizations, comprehensive support services, and programs and practices that reduce barriers to businesses and employment opportunities for members of disadvantaged communities.

Keep in mind that the examples shown on this slide are just examples of DEIA commitments, and they're not requirements. The goal for applicants is to demonstrate DEIA objectives that are directly stemming from their project, are aligned with their project, and are not limited to general company-wide strategies and that will have measurable impacts. Next slide, please.

In terms of Justice40, an effective CBP will describe a plan for benefits associated with Justice40, as well as mitigating any anticipated impacts. For example, if the environmental impact assessment of the project reflects negative impacts, then the applicant must identify such impacts and propose mitigating actions to decrease environmental exposure and burdens. In general, the applications should model, offer to monitor, or ameliorate environmental impacts.

Also, a project does not need to be geographically situated in a DAC for a DAC to demonstrate the benefit to a DAC. In addition, DACs are not limited to geographic proximity. DACs are also defined as those with a common condition, a geographically dispersed set of individuals such as migrant workers or Native Americans, where either type of group experiences common conditions.

DAC benefits can be measurable direct or measurable-- or direct or indirect-- in an indirect or indirect way, as well as secondary benefits from the long-term impacts of the project. Applicants should clearly identify communities that will be impacted by the project and where they are located, either by name, zip code, or the CEJST tool.

But this doesn't mean that the project must be located in a DAC. Applicants are encouraged to find ways for benefits to flow to the DACs when the project is not located in one. Again, keep in mind that the examples shown on the slide are just illustrative, for illustration purposes. They are not requirements. With this, we conclude the summary of an effective CBP using the four priority goals. Next slide, please. Now that you have a better sense of an effective CBP-- of the contents of an effective CBP, we will go over the template and other requirements to keep in mind when submitting your application to the GRIP program. The use of a CBP demonstration and deployment template is required. You can find the CBP template under documents on exchange for the specific FOA.

The purpose of the template is to summarize the specific objectives. And whenever possible, the objectives in the CBP should be quantifiable when available in terms of smart milestones, including at least one smart milestone per budget period and one smart milestone at the end of the project goal.

Applicants will memorialize their project's specific smart milestones in the CBOO table located at the end of the CBP template.

Again, as a reminder, you do not need to fill every box in the template. You only will find-- find what is applicable to your project and use that information to fill your CBP template. The information in the CBP must be consistent with other parts of the application such as the technical volume and environmental assessments. Next slide, please.

Now going more into the details of the CBP template, you will find instructional text boxes within each section in the template with some examples of commitments that may be relevant to each section. Find what is applicable to your project and memorialize it in the document. Take the template as an opportunity to identify the universe of benefits that are directly stemming from your project. Again CBP and CBOO, and other components of the application must be in harmony and the information should be consistent across the documentation. Next slide, please.

At the end of the CBP, you will find the milestones summary table, which will become the CBOO, the community benefits objectives and outcomes document. The CBOO, as you can see, it consolidates the CBP information into specific milestones. It will assist project staff with progress review and reporting, for which the applicant should customize and add or delete rows and columns so the table summarizes your specific commitments and timelines. The examples provided in the template are not intended to be prescriptive or applicable to each project.

The information that should not be included in the CBOO are specific dates only include general timeframes and not a specific day, month, and year. Do not include subcontractors, vendors, or individuals by name. The award is with the prime, and as such, the CBOOs should not generally reference the subcontractors. Also, please leave out proprietary information or confidential information. Examples of milestones and details that will be included in the CBP and BLI in this table could include having or planning CBAs, labor agreements, specific number of jobs to be created, and others. We provide these as examples. These specific items are not requirements. All milestones will be specific to your project. Next slide, please.

Now that we went over the contents and the template, we want to go over a summary of best practices. Again, use only elements in the template that are specific to your project. Be specific with smart milestones. CBP and CBOO milestone table should be easily cross-referenced, along with other documents in the application. And make sure that your proposed smart milestones are achievable, are reasonable within your timeline, your scope, your budget, and other resources. And also make sure that if you have any environmental impacts-- negative environmental impacts, that these are documented and appropriately mitigated.

The CBP and the CBOO must reflect efforts undertaken within the project proposal. Please do not over-rely on past efforts and achievements. And make sure that you include everything that's relevant for your project.

One final comment that I want to make is that the CBOO will not replace the CBP. If selected, your project-specific CBP will continue to be part of your project documentation and the CBOO will be part of the award. For more information, please go to the relevant section in the FOA. Next slide, please.

I wanted to also provide some insight on what happens with each one of these components or these documents during the negotiation-- or negotiation stage for selected projects. I would like to note that this is different from the first round of funding. There's a separate budget justification just for the CBP.

So for the community benefits plan, what will happen during the negotiation stage is that it will go through a series of reviews that will solidify and strengthen the commitments reflected in the CBP, and will complete-- and will also complete budget justifications. And that is applicants will complete them.

And the CBOO, which is originated in the CBP, that summary of milestones, will be also refined. Part of it is going to be publicly available and demonstrate-- it will-- we will ensure that it demonstrates the CBP commitments with specific metrics and timelines . Associated

With this, I conclude this part of the training. Thank you so much. And it's back to Colin.

COLIN MEEHAN: Thank you, Elizabeth. Can we go to the next slide, please? Sorry.

So first, I want to share some insights from the first round of funding. And you may have already seen some of this information, but I just want to emphasize that as you consider developing your community benefits plan for your application in this cycle of funding. Looking at the chart on the right, you can see the comparison from the advisory reviewer process scoring for full applications in blue and the projects that were selected, ultimately, to participate in the GRIP program in yellow. And what this shows is a clear and strong correlation between high quality community benefits plans and being selected in the first GRIP funding cohort.

Two key takeaways that come to us from this are that number one, we generally saw that the strongest overall applications tended to have very strong community benefits plans, but that also, for those applications that were on the margin of potentially being selected, we did see community benefits plans act as a differentiating factor in those selection decisions. So this is clearly a critical part of everyone's application and we can't emphasize that enough. And so I really appreciate Elizabeth taking the time to walk us all through the different elements of community benefits and the templates that you're going to be using in your application. So I encourage you all to go through and review those as you're developing your application materials.

A couple of insights I wanted to share and highlight that we saw with successful community benefits plans in the first cycle. The first is a commitment to the inclusion of at least one smart goal or milestone per budget period. And you've got that abbreviation there, specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely.

That's a really critical element. It is something that we're requesting in the community benefits plans, and the inclusion of that is a clear marker that you've thought through how exactly you plan to accomplish the objectives set out in your community benefits plan. The second is the inclusion of opportunities to elicit and respond to community feedback at multiple stages of project development and deployment.

So this is, again, another really critical element. The engagement with community and labor is a key part of any successful project deployment, with or without a community benefits plan. But this is a way that we gain confidence in a project proponent's ability to both execute their overall project, but also to ensure that they are incorporating community feedback as they develop the project and deploy it. And third, a demonstrated intention to negotiate additional commitments if needed.

This is really important. We recognize that each of these projects is unique and specific. The needs of the communities that are impacted by these projects are specific as well. So we recognize the need for flexibility.

What is important for us, and what we saw in community benefits plans that were generally successful, was that the applicant was able to demonstrate that they do have the intent to negotiate additional

commitments, if those are needed. So I just wanted to highlight that for all of you that are considering applying. I hope you'll find that useful as you develop your community benefits plans.

And next, before we go to the questions and answers, I wanted to highlight two examples of effective community benefits plans. If we could go to the next slide, please. First, before we dive into these, I want to emphasize a few things. I want to encourage you to focus on the themes that you see here, not the specifics.

Each project that we've seen and each project that we selected in the GRIP program is unique and stands very much apart from the other projects, for the most part. And so it would stand to reason, then, that the community benefits plans and the elements of those plans are unique. What is really important here is we want to encourage all applicants to find the community benefits that align most with your specific projects. And in order to do so, you need to obviously have a firm understanding of the project, but also of the needs of the community, and that requires engagement with those communities.

So here we've got the Louisiana Hubs for Energy-Resilient Operations, or HERO Project. And this community benefits plan particularly stood out for us because of the very strong focus on disadvantaged communities, and specifically deploying grid resilience elements in those disadvantaged communities in an area of the country that we all know is in need of substantial grid resilience support, as we see increasing frequency and severity of all kinds of different extreme weather in that area, certainly flooding and high wind being prevalent among those populations.

So the other elements-- in addition to just the overall project being designed in a way that emphasizes disadvantaged communities, within the community benefits plan, the State of Louisiana the Department of Natural Resources identified a workforce training initiative to focus on 875 new graduates that they provided a substantial amount of detail and then project labor agreements, again, going back to the demonstrated intent to develop new commitments and agreements as needed.

This really demonstrated to us that they had an ability to do that as the project continues to evolve. So for the Louisiana project, we see a combination of an emphasis on disadvantaged communities in their deployment itself, but also in a way that incorporates the feedback of those communities into the development of the project, because the project is going to touch hundreds of communities, literally, throughout Louisiana.

The community benefits plan included a lot of discussion on how they plan to incorporate community feedback into the ultimate design and layout of the project. So if we can go to the next slide, I'll talk about one more example of an effective community benefits plan.

So here's another one. And again, I encourage you to focus on the themes and not the specifics. This comes from the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs and Portland General Electric. In contrast to the Louisiana project, which was a deployment of hundreds of microgrids throughout the state in disadvantaged communities, this is a deployment and an upgrade, really, of a regional transmission line. So a substantial increase in transfer capacity for Oregon and developing an ability to deliver more of the resource-rich renewable energy generation that's coming from East of the cascades into the population centers of Oregon. So that's the project itself. But really, one of the keys here is that Portland General Electric and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs are equal partners in the relationship and they are collaborators in developing and bringing this application to us. Because of that nature of having a tribal government directly engaged in the development of the project, you'll see throughout here an emphasis on engaging and incorporating tribal priorities into the project.

Obviously, we are strongly encouraging tribal governments, tribal utilities, and others involved in tribal communities to develop and apply for programs. And for those organizations, we want to see that reflection here. I do want to emphasize that-- I do want to emphasize that as you consider your community benefits plans, we want you to design it in a way that works for your project and that really works for the communities that can and will be impacted by your project.

In this case, those communities very much include tribal governments. And so you see a lot of things in here about preference and hiring for tribal members, and other initiatives to focus on workforce development in the tribal territories. There's also in this community benefits plan a lot of focus on targeting and training for the workforce disadvantaged communities throughout the region and leveraging the existing relationships with unions, in particular, the IBEW, to fill out the workforce for this project.

The collaboration with IBEW, extends beyond that into pre-apprenticeship opportunities. And you can see here there's an energy mentorship program as well. So we have a combination of a real and meaningful commitment and engagement with existing disadvantaged communities, including tribal governments, as well as a very strong focus on workforce development, including working with existing labor unions, working with existing institutions of education. So these are some of the elements that we've seen and some examples that have been some of the most effective community benefits plans in the first funding cycle.

And I just want to close this out by emphasizing again that as you consider your community benefits plan, it's important to identify and understand the impacts of your project on local communities, including the beneficial and potentially the impacts that some communities-- that may not be beneficial. It may even be negative for some communities. It's important to understand and evaluate those, collaborate with the community, or identify the manner in which you intend to collaborate with the community, and engage with them to incorporate their feedback into the overall project to make sure that they are getting the benefits that are most needed in those communities.

Again, it's going to look different for each project, and we fully expect that. But hopefully these examples serve as a little bit of a guideline to you all. And with that, I think we can go to the next slide.

And I believe we're-- I do want to read again this webinar notice. Just as a reminder to you all, none of the information presented in this presentation is legally binding. The content included in this presentation is intended for informational purposes and is relating to the funding opportunity announcement, which is-- I'll go ahead and read it out, DE-FOA-0003195.

Any content in this presentation that appears discrepant from the FOA language is superseded by the FOA language. So if you have any questions, anything that I've said or Elizabeth said that don't seem to be in line with the FOA, the FOA is the governing document for how this program is being administered. So all applicants are strongly encouraged to carefully read FOA guidelines and adhere to those guidelines.

The purpose of this training is to provide an overview of the community benefits plan requirements. It is critical that you write your applications based on the detailed information in the FOA. With that, can we go to the last slide?

Finally, before we move into the Q&A, just as a reminder, we've got the links here for our website, as well as to ask questions. If you have a question specific to an application or to this funding opportunity announcement, please [INAUDIBLE] the FOA3195@netl.doe.gov email address. If you send an email to the GRIP@hq.doe.gov that is relating to this FOA, we are going to have to send it to that other email

address, so you will just slow down the process. The quicker response that you can get is going to be to go directly to the FOA email address. And with that, I think we can move into the Q&A part of the discussion.

WHITNEY BELL: All right. Thank you so much, Colin and Elizabeth. That was wonderful. A lot of information, but thank you so much for outlining it and walking through it all for everyone. So as Colin said, we now have some time to address some of the most commonly asked questions that were submitted during the registration process. So let's go ahead and get started.

So this one here is for Colin. This person says they're interested in clarification on Justice40 benefits, and if 40% of the funds for every award has to benefit a Justice40 area, or 40% of total grant funding has to benefit Justice40? Relatedly, what if a project is not located in a disadvantaged community?

COLIN MEEHAN: Thanks for that, Whitney. So just real briefly, the Justice40 initiative requires that 40% of the benefits from infrastructure funding in both the IIJA and the IRA go to disadvantaged communities. And so that does not require that each specific project has exactly 40%. What it does require is that as a program, we want to make sure that we are doing our best to meet or ideally exceed that goal, and we see a lot of value and a lot of opportunity in doing so.

To get to the second part of the question, if a project is not located in a disadvantaged community, I think you can see from the 58 projects that we have on our website that were selected in the first round, several of those were not located in disadvantaged communities, but still impacted disadvantaged communities and created good opportunities to create benefits for those communities.

So from our perspective, the goal is to make sure that even if a project is not specifically located in a particular community, that applicants are doing their best to identify how they can create benefits for communities that may be impacted by the project, even if it's not located there. Thanks for that, Whitney.

WHITNEY BELL: And thank you for clarifying. Elizabeth, this one is for you. How do community benefits apply to entities like software providers?

ELIZABETH O'CONNELL: Thank you, Whitney. I guess my answer to that one is that it's regardless of the type of project deployment that you are proposing, there are always opportunities to take steps that benefit impacted communities. So if you are a software provider, I would encourage you to find ways to make sure that the benefits are flowing to disadvantaged communities.

And it could be things like hiring practices that create new opportunities in terms of DEIA, or demonstrated that the software removes or accounts for implicit bias, or the communities have the opportunity to benefit from their specific project. It sometimes is a little bit challenging, depending on the nature of the project to find those opportunities.

But we have seen in several different instances very creative ways to make sure that disadvantaged communities are impacted. So I would encourage any software applicant, or any software provider that is considering to apply for the program to find those ways within their project scope, of course, and their timeline.

WHITNEY BELL: Good. Thank you. I have another question here for you, Elizabeth. To what level of detail will applicants need to describe the terms of an intended community benefits agreement?

ELIZABETH O'CONNELL: That's a great question. I would say keep in mind that your CBP should be kept at a level that it can demonstrate those benefits. In terms of community benefits agreement specifically, we understand we went over that concept in our presentation today. It's an agreement signed by the community or community groups or coalitions and a project developer.

And we understand that sometimes, it's hard to have that agreement finalized, but at least identify those community or labor benefits that a developer is agreeing to in return for that community support will go a long ways, even though-- if the agreement is not fully completed or inked out. So I would say the level of detail depends on the project, and it depends-- should be gauged by how you're thinking that your project can demonstrate those benefits with impacted communities, and how you're demonstrating that impacted communities had input in that agreement.

WHITNEY BELL: Thank you so much. Colin, if multiple community benefit agreements-type documents are collected before the application, should the applicant upload all of the agreements or include a list of the agreements in the CBP?

COLIN MEEHAN: That's a great question. I think it's-- I love that applicants are thinking in this way. Those community benefit agreements are a really helpful sign an indicator for us of where they are in the process. So it's great to hear this question.

I guess I would say there is-- in the FOA, there is no specific direction, at least to my knowledge, as to how to approach this. I think the most important thing is that the application has to stay within the page limits. If the multiple CBAs would exceed page limits, I think it would be a reasonable approach to provide maybe a sample or a few samples of the community benefits agreements, along with a list of the existing community benefit agreements, or the ones that are under consideration and the counterparties involved in each of those. I think that would that would help reviewers understand the level of detail that an applicant has provided.

WHITNEY BELL: Good. Thank you. Elizabeth, how do you approach coalition CBPs with any subrecipients in their own communities?

ELIZABETH O'CONNELL: Oh, with a lot of energy because it's a lot of work. No, in all seriousness, the coalition applications, we're very excited to see when we see that collaborative approach. In terms of the CBP in how 2% of CBP that has so many subrecipients in their own communities, I would say to focus on the four strategic goals, or the priority goals that we've discussed today, and make sure that you're working together with impacted communities to identify the best approach to address the needs, the wants from the community, and to reflect those in a way that is demonstrative in your proposal. Especially for those communities that have been historically disadvantaged, I think it's important to highlight for coalition proposals this is what the proposal is bringing to the table. This is how the community is going to benefit. This is how we know this is what the community-- or how the community has provided input in this proposal. And I think that would go a long ways. But we understand that it can be challenging, and to be fair, it's challenging for all of us. But we're always very excited to see coalition and those type of applications with multiple subrecipients and multiple communities.

WHITNEY BELL: Great. Thank you so much. I hope everybody brings that enthusiastic energy to that one. So then we have time for one more question. And Elizabeth, this might be for you. If we have internships, community college training programs, et cetera, can we incorporate all of those existing elements into our community benefits plans?

ELIZABETH O'CONNELL: That is a really good question, and I think I touched on this a little bit during the presentation. We encourage applicants to present their previous engagements and efforts just to provide context on their position within a specific community. But the CBPs are intended to focus on the incremental impacts that one specific project will have in a community.

So you're welcome to highlight prior efforts, prior accomplishments. But really, you should be spending more of your energy and time in identifying those incremental or additional benefits that aren't related directly to your project and that will benefit the community as you have an understanding of what the community needs coming from a specific engagement or feedback, or input from the community. Again, the emphasis should be on the new or additive actions your project will be taking to address, in this case, internships, community college training programs, et cetera that are associated with your specific project.

WHITNEY BELL: All right. Well, thank you so much. That actually wraps up today's webinar. We are right about at time.

So all the questions that you all did submit today throughout the webinar will be reviewed and may be used to update our GRIP Program FAQ. So thank you so much for sending those in.

As a reminder, a copy of today's slides will be available on the website. We'll put that link in the chat momentarily, by this Friday. And then the recording will be available on the same page in about two weeks. And we will send you an email when it is available.

Colin and Elizabeth, thank you so much for your time. And thank you to all of our attendees for participating today. Take care everyone, and we will see you next time.

COLIN MEEHAN: Thank you.

ELIZABETH O'CONNELL: Thank you all.