

## **Straw Proposal**

# **DEEP Climate Resilience Grant Program**

*Issued April 25, 2022*

### **Introduction**

There is overwhelming and incontrovertible evidence that man-made greenhouse gas emissions are causing climate change. According to the Long Island Sound Study and the University of Connecticut, the state is already experiencing climate change impacts including 8 to 9 inches of global sea level rise since 1880, accelerating coastal erosion, a warming Long Island Sound, hotter warmest and coldest days of the year, more annual rain and snowfall, and more intense rainfall. In 2021 alone, Connecticut communities were harmed by multiple unprecedented and extreme weather events, including record-breaking rainfall from Tropical Storms Elsa, Fred, Henri, and the remnants of Hurricane Ida, poor air quality and closed schools and businesses due to heat waves, multiple federal disaster declarations, and the first National Weather Service “Flash Flood Emergency” in Connecticut’s history, which resulted in more than 1,000 rescues of residents trapped by floodwaters.

The Governor’s Council on Climate Change (“GC3”), established pursuant to Executive Order No. 3 (“EO3”), issued September 3, 2019, concluded that because of delays in reducing (or mitigating) dangerous greenhouse gases, the extreme events we saw in Connecticut in 2021 will worsen. The state will experience the following changes by 2050: stronger storms with more wind and rain, longer, more frequent droughts, up to 20 inches of sea level rise along the coast, increased frequency of coastal flooding with levels like those seen in Superstorm Sandy every 5-10 years, increased risk of extreme rainfall, and an average of 20 additional 90°F+ days per year. The GC3 also found that without rapid climate mitigation action now, warming in Connecticut will accelerate and sea level rise could be as much as 80 inches by 2100.

In January 2021, the GC3 released the report, *Taking Action on Climate Change and Building a More Resilient Connecticut for All*, with 61 recommendations for near-term actions to address climate change. On December 16, 2021, Governor Lamont signed Executive Order No. 21-3 (“EO21-3”), which implemented 23 actions to support climate resilience and clean energy in Connecticut aligned with recommendations of the GC3. Assisting Connecticut communities with building resilience to the impacts of climate change was a core component of EO21-3 in response to GC3 Financing & Funding Adaptation & Resilience recommendations. In Section 9 of that order, DEEP was charged with developing a program, pursuant to CGS Sec. 16-243y and authorized bond funds under Public Act 21-111, to provide funds for climate adaptation and resilience planning and project development with the following conditions:

- The program must ensure that at least 40% of funding resources are targeted to where vulnerable populations<sup>1</sup> reside and that those plans address the needs of those populations.
- Funding should be available for the design of nature-based solutions, including green infrastructure; flood prevention, climate resilience and erosion control systems; gray infrastructure; and non-structural project solutions.
- Projects funded under this program should be integrated in plans that ensure their eligibility for federal funding through existing and new resilience programs, in consultation with resilience partners and/or programs.

The creation of this climate resilience funding program in EO21-3 was also motivated by the historic investment in climate resilience represented by the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (“IIJA”)*, with approximately \$47 billion in funding available nationwide to help communities prepare for climate-related hazards. To ensure that Connecticut’s communities are at the front of the line for these largely competitive federal resilience investments, a primary outcome of this program is to help Connecticut communities develop a climate resilience project pipeline that can win competitive federal grant funding to substantially fund those projects’ implementation and construction.

## Call for Applications

In response to EO 21-3 and pursuant to CGS Sec. 16-243y and authorized bond funds under Public Act 21-111, DEEP has developed this straw proposal for the DEEP Climate Resilience Grant Program, which would provide funding under two tracks: 1) Planning, and 2) Project Development, consistent with the above conditions of EO 21-3 and as further detailed below. To ensure all projects funded under this program support climate adaptation and resilience, all Track 2 applicants must have already completed resilience planning or must concurrently undertake resilience planning under a separate Track 1 application. All plans and projects should also incorporate the [PERSISTS](#) framework to ensure all resulting climate resilience projects are permissible, equitable, realistic, safe, innovative, scientific, transferable, and sustainable. Though the DEEP Climate Resilience Grant program is not primarily intended to assist communities with reducing greenhouse gas emissions, plans and projects that have the co-benefit of building resilience while reducing greenhouse gas emissions are highly encouraged.

To achieve the intended project pipeline for [IIJA funding opportunities](#), the DEEP Climate Resilience Grant program will require applicants to identify which federal resilience grant programs they intend to apply to for implementation funding and prepare for those applications.

Federal resilience grant competitions for communities include, but are not limited to:

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<sup>1</sup> Pursuant to CGS Sec.16-243y “Vulnerable communities” means populations that may be disproportionately impacted by the effects of climate change, including, but not limited to, low and moderate income communities, environmental justice communities pursuant to section 22a-20a, communities eligible for community reinvestment pursuant to section 36a-30 and the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977, 12 USC 2901 et seq., as amended from time to time, populations with increased risk and limited means to adapt to the effects of climate change, or as further defined by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection in consultation with community representatives.

- [Federal Emergency Management Agency \(FEMA\) Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities \(BRIC\) program](#)
- [FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program \(HMGP\)](#)
- [FEMA Flood Mitigation Assistance Program \(FMA\)](#)
- [National Fish and Wildlife Federation \(NFWF\) National Coastal Resilience Fund \(NCRF\)](#)
- [NFWF Long Island Sound Futures Fund \(LISFF\)](#)

Funding may also be available for projects through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the US Department of Transportation (DOT), the Department of Energy (DOE), and the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). Not all of these federal resilience programs provide funding directly to communities, but the Track 1: Planning funding can identify projects where other eligible entities, including the state, might apply for implementation and construction funds.



Note: Activities that fit under Track 1 and Track 2 are eligible for funding under this proposal. Expenses related to implementation and construction are not eligible activities under this program.

## Track 1: Planning

Grants awarded under this track are intended to fund comprehensive climate resilience planning that addresses the impacts of climate-related hazards, including climate change. The planning must identify next steps and have a prioritized list of projects for development. The result and one of the final deliverables must be a plan that can be implemented. Plans can be at the regional, municipal, or neighborhood level (“hyper-local”) scale. Applicants may request additional funds for enhanced community engagement. Awarded projects will be eligible to seek federal grant writing support through technical assistance provided by DEEP.

Proposals with a stakeholder-driven process and meaningful community collaboration and involvement will be the most competitive. Projects that simply update existing planning will not be competitive. Proposals should clearly demonstrate how communities will incorporate climate change into risk assessments and planning. Grants shall be awarded only to applicants based on meeting the Review Criteria and subject to the Commissioner’s discretion.

### Funded Activities:

- Climate resilience planning that addresses the impacts of climate-related hazards, including climate change
- Enhanced community engagement to support climate resilience planning

Applications will be evaluated and ultimately selected based upon the following review criteria:

### **Proposed Review Criteria**

- Overall potential impact of the plan to improve community climate resilience
- Clearly identifies the plan as regional, municipal or neighborhood level (“hyper-local”) scale
- Degree to which assessment and planning process is collaborative and stakeholder-driven
- Demonstrated plan to have participation from multiple related local government departments
- Demonstrated collaboration and partnership between local government and relevant community organizations for plan development
- Strength and depth of stakeholder and community involvement and engagement, with at least one public workshop
- Demonstrated understanding and inclusion of current and future climate conditions out to 2050 due to climate change and sea level rise for planning and assessment
- Vulnerability assessment centered on impacts from climate change and resulting community impacts, including to identified critical facilities<sup>2</sup> and [community lifelines](#)
- Vulnerability assessment examines social vulnerability, including data documentation to support federal grant applications
- Planning serves or benefits environmental justice or vulnerable communities
- For neighborhood-level planning: demonstrated collaboration and partnership with community organizations and local governments
- Inclusion of prioritized list of next steps that:
  - Strongly ties in CIRCA’s [PERSISTS](#) framework for project identification
  - Identifies federal resilience grant competitions they will target for funding future implementation steps
  - Includes federal resilience grant project narratives for selected next steps
  - Includes a locally derived match funding strategy for highest priority next steps
- Plan should have co-benefits (i.e. addresses multiple issues, creates an amenity to the community, reduces GHG emissions, comprehensive approach to risk reduction)
- Proposal is technically sound and feasible, and the proposal sets forth a clear, logical, and achievable work plan and timeline
- Proposal costs are allowable and reasonable
- For those applicants who have previously received funding through the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, past performance will be a factor considered in the approval process

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<sup>2</sup> Pursuant to EO21-3, critical facilities include all facilities deemed critical by the local, state, or federal governments; wastewater treatment plants; power generation facilities; data storage facilities; emergency shelters; and police and fire facilities.

## Track 2: Project Development

Successful applications under Track 2: Project Development funds will advance climate resilience planning into the next steps toward implementation. The overall goal is to help communities and project teams develop competitive applications for federal resilience competitions that will support construction and implementation.

Applicants may request additional funds for enhanced community engagement. Awarded projects will be eligible to seek federal grant writing support.

Eligible projects funded under this program include nature-based solutions, including green infrastructure; flood prevention, climate resilience and erosion control systems; gray infrastructure and non-structural project solutions that improve community resilience to climate-related hazards. Projects in this program must be integrated in plans that ensure their eligibility for federal funding through existing and new resilience programs. Projects that advance nature-based solutions, hybrid approaches, address multiple issues, and/or non-structural solutions will be more competitive.

### **Funded activities include:**

- Site studies and selection
- Preliminary designs
- Engineering and hydrological studies and analyses to support climate resilience project development
- Benefit cost analyses
- Final designs
- Community engagement to support all activities
- Additional activities that lead to the development of a competitive application to federal resilience competitions.

Applications will be evaluated and ultimately selected based upon the following review criteria:

### **Proposed Review Criteria**

- Overall potential impact of the proposal to improve community climate resilience
- Application identifies and aligns with federal resilience grant programs that the applicant intends to pursue to fund implementation
- Project to be incorporated into a draft grant project narrative and application supporting materials for identified funding sources will be prepared
- Strength of locally derived match funding strategy for implementation
- Project is identified in previous climate resilience planning activities
- Project incorporates the impacts of climate change into design
- Project connects with CIRCA's [PERSISTS](#) framework
- Project serves or benefits environmental justice or vulnerable communities
- Strength and depth of community involvement and engagement
- Project should include elements of nature-based solutions
- Project should have co-benefits (i.e. addresses multiple issues, creates an amenity to the community, reduces GHG emissions, comprehensive approach to risk reduction)

- Project is technically sound and feasible, and the proposal sets forth a clear, logical, and achievable work plan and timeline
- Project costs are allowable and reasonable
- For those applicants who have previously received funding through the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, past performance will be a factor considered in the approval process

## Applicant Eligibility

All entities that work in or around the resilience sector are eligible to apply, including municipalities, state agencies, nonprofits, academic institutions, and private entities seeking to develop climate resilience planning and projects. All projects must demonstrate strong commitment and partnership with local governments and community organizations. Partnerships that demonstrate community collaboration through strong resident and stakeholder engagement throughout the process are strongly encouraged.

If the primary applicant is not a municipality, letters of support from local governments must make staff time commitments for specific tasks in the planning process.

## Vulnerable Populations Priority Eligibility

Pursuant to EO 21-3, "Funding for this program should be allocated to ensure that at least 40% of resources for municipalities are targeted to municipalities where vulnerable populations, as defined in CGS Sec. 16-243y, reside and where plans are developed specifically to address the needs of identified vulnerable populations."

Pursuant to CGS Sec. 16-243y, "vulnerable communities" means populations that may be disproportionately impacted by the effects of climate change, including, but not limited to,

- Low and moderate income communities,
- Environmental justice communities pursuant to section 22a-20a,
- Communities eligible for community reinvestment pursuant to section 36a-30 and the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977, 12 USC 2901 et seq., as amended from time to time,
- Populations with increased risk and limited means to adapt to the effects of climate change,
- Or as further defined by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection in consultation with community representatives."

For environmental justice communities DEEP proposes to use [the map of environmental justice communities on the DEEP website](#). Projects that fall within any communities or census block groups in that map will be considered targeting a vulnerable population.

Applicants that are communities eligible for community reinvestment pursuant to section 36a-30 and the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977, 12 USC 2901 et seq. will be considered targeting a vulnerable population.

Additional definitions and indices may be included to identify vulnerable populations that are low and moderate income and/or that have increased risk and limited means to adapt to the effects of climate change based on feedback on this straw proposal, including responses to questions posed by DEEP in the Notice of this straw proposal.

## Project Duration

- **For Track 1: Planning:** 12-18 months depending on project scope, complexity, and community engagement plan
- **For Track 2: Project Development:** Up to 12 months for design and engineering studies.

## Required Meetings and Deliverables

- **Technical assistance meetings:** DEEP will support all grantees with technical assistance to ensure they are able to apply the best available science and can maximize climate resilience resources. The grantee review panel will determine technical assistance meetings based on the submitted application.
- **Final report:** The report should include an executive summary of how the grant team accomplished the goals of the project and include a copy of the plan, design, study, and other funded activity. The report must also include the required match funding strategy and grant application components for next steps, based on track requirements.