



Agenda Item Summary

File #: 24-00891

Agenda Date: 10/8/2024

Agenda Item Name:

Contingent Partnership Agreement with Cultural Arts Coalition for Grant-Funded Community Engagement

Presenter:

Betsy Riley, Sustainability Manager, 352-264-6908

Description:

Partnership Agreement with the Cultural Arts Coalition to conduct community engagement on behalf of the EMPOWER Coalition as part of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Environmental and Climate Justice Community Change Grants Program (Notice of Funding Opportunity number EPA-R-OEJECR-OCS-23-04). Agreement is contingent on receiving grant funding and will not be activated otherwise.

Recommended Action:

Board to approve and sign Partnership Agreement

Prior Board Motions:

January 22, 2024, Item #24-00100, Joint Meeting with the City of Gainesville. The Joint Board heard the presentation from the December 12, 2023 meeting (including discussion of the EMPOWER Coalition's intent to apply for the EPA Community Change Grant) and voted to approve signatures on the EMPOWER Coalition document which states "The undersigned organizations that support the work of the EMPOWER Coalition are listed below."

December 12, 2023, Item #23-00752. The Community Solar Leasing program, which is the focus of this grant proposal, was discussed, including listing the EPA Community Change Grant as a new grant being solicited.

Fiscal Note:

The terms of the Partnership Agreement are contingent on being awarded the grant. At this time, there are no fiscal impacts.

Strategic Guide:

Social and Economic Opportunity

Background:

Project Energy Modernization for People, Opportunity, Work, Equity, and Renewables (EMPOWER) is a community-driven initiative to transition Alachua County, Florida, to 100% clean energy in a way that is equitable and benefits all residents. The US Department of Energy selected the project for a

technical assistance grant to support the development of a roadmap for this transition.

Project EMPOWER, now the EMPOWER Coalition, is exploring the potential to develop programs to:

- Reduce energy bills for residents through expanded energy efficiency and weatherization services.
- Develop a pathway to electrification of space and water heating systems.
- Develop solar projects in eligible low-income neighborhoods, potentially linked in a microgrid for climate resilience.
- Incorporate youth internships in the energy efficiency and construction process.

The EMPOWER Coalition, led by the coalition member Cultural Arts Coalition (CAC), conducts community engagement work with neighborhood groups, nonprofits, and local government to build relationships and learn together. Through an exchange of information with residents, the coalition has (and continues to) educate itself about energy issues and hear from residents about which questions they want to be addressed and the solutions they want to help income-challenged families and develop an equitable transition to renewable energy and climate resilience.

As part of this work, EMPOWER Coalition members routinely apply for grant funding opportunities such as the EPA Community Change Grant, to better position our community to develop sound plans for funding community-focused energy and resiliency programs.

Benefits of Project EMPOWER

Project EMPOWER has the potential to make a real difference in the lives of Alachua County residents by:

- Reducing energy bills for low-income families
- Creating jobs and economic opportunities in the energy efficiency and construction industries
- Making the community more resilient to power outages
- Promoting environmental justice by ensuring all residents benefit from the transition to clean energy.

The EMPOWER program came from a 2021 County-Wide Forum on Transitioning Towards 100% Clean Energy, sponsored by the Alachua County NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Committee (ECJC). After the Forum, a team that included representatives from the NAACP ECJC and the Community Weatherization Coalition (CWC), Alachua County, Gainesville Regional Utilities, and Gainesville Community Reinvestment Area worked together.

The team was selected – one of only 23 US communities and the only one in Florida -- for a technical assistance grant from the US Department of Energy to support community-driven action plans to increase energy resilience, lower utility costs and energy burdens, and provide long-term jobs and economic opportunities in Alachua County (LEAP Communities).

The selected communities worked over 12-18 months with DOE, its national labs and other experts, government and non-governmental partners, community-based organizations, and utilities, as well as environmental, economic development, and equity organizations to develop roadmaps for an equitable pathway to 100% renewable energy, with a focus on marginalized communities that are experiencing economic challenges.

With the technical assistance provided, Project EMPOWER explored the potential to develop programs to reduce energy bills for residents through expanded energy efficiency and weatherization services; develop a pathway to electrification of space and water heating systems;

develop solar projects in eligible low-income neighborhoods, potentially linked in a microgrid for climate resilience; and incorporate youth internships in the energy efficiency and construction process.

Near the conclusion of the LEAP Communities grant program, Alachua County and the EMPOWER Coalition applied for consideration to be part of the second cohort of the same grant program, and received a second award from DOE NREL which has helped us pursue grant funding for our solar leasing strategy which was imagined and developed as part of the first LEAP Communities grant award.