



Agenda Item Summary

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Agenda Date: 7/8/2025

Agenda Item Name:

EMPOWER Coalition Collaboration Letter

Presenter:

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Description:

Request from the EMPOWER Coalition to continue Alachua County's participation as a member of the EMPOWER Coalition.

Recommended Action:

Sign updated collaboration letter (2025)

Prior Board Motions:

At the January 22, 2024 Joint Meeting with the City of Gainesville, the Joint Board approved City and County signatures on the original 2024 EMPOWER Coalition Collaboration Letter.

At the December 12, 2023 County Commission Meeting, the Board authorized staff to continue to work with the EMPOWER team.

Fiscal Note:

There is no fiscal impact to the BOCC.

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 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.

Project EMPOWER engages with neighborhood groups, nonprofits, and local government to build relationships and learn together. Through an exchange of information with residents, the project will 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.

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 Coalition 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.

EMPOWER Coalition Accomplishments

- Sustained community outreach efforts starting with a kickoff meeting in early 2023 followed by broader community meetings in 2024 and on-going engagement with representatives of our partner neighborhoods of Springhill/Sugarhill, Duval, and SWAG.
- Organized a Green Jobs Pipeline Roundtable Discussion in 2022 focused on creating a “green jobs pipeline” to link programs in public schools’ curriculum with vocational training programs, internships, employment, and business and entrepreneurship opportunities.
- Organized monthly Weatherization Coordination meetings that bring together local service providers, resulting in the: creation of a guide to help residents seeking weatherization services; identification of bottlenecks in the provision of services provision; creation of Weatherization Technician Certification modules at Santa Fe College.
- Obtained a \$10,000 grant for green jobs development from Jobs for the Future (JFF), making the team eligible for future rounds of more funding.
- Obtained an Energy Efficiency for Renters grant for technical assistance to improve the functioning of the Alachua County Energy Efficiency Program.
- Designed an innovative solar lease model that fits within the restrictive regulations of the state but also, if funded, will provide significant and long-lasting benefits to our current partner communities and other communities as we seek to expand our outreach.
- Obtained a grant from a private donor to support a pilot project to create a community-managed Community Benefits Fund (CBF) to install a solar array on a County building and generate funds to support the CBF over the long-term.
- Submitted applications for nine grants with funding ranging from \$50,000 to \$35.7 million. Other grant proposals are also in preparation.
- Nominated NKwanda Jah for the 2024 Dr. Espanola Jackson Energy Justice award, which she won in a landslide election.

Green Job Partnership Letter of Collaboration

The EMPOWER team is requesting all team members to sign on to the Letter of Collaboration. This document will assist the team in going after grant requests and shows the institutional, governmental, and community commitment to creating high quality green jobs. Santa Fe College and the Alachua County School Board have signed.