



Agenda Item Summary

File #: 25-00101

Agenda Date: 8/26/2025

Agenda Item Name:

Grant Awarded – Lydia B. Stokes Foundation Community Investment Fund Grant Award

Presenter:

Betsy Riley, Sustainability Manager, 352-264-6908

Description:

The Alachua County Resiliency Office and Economic Development Office have received a grant award of private dollars from the Lydia B. Stokes Foundation to construct an institutional solar pilot program, as developed through two cycles of technical assistance support from the Department of Energy's National Renewable Energy Laboratory Communities LEAP grant. This agenda item would approve County staff to begin work on a small solar photovoltaic array and develop a Community Investment Fund using the utility savings from the proposed solar array.

Recommended Action:

Approve County acceptance of the grant funding from the Lydia B. Stokes Foundation authorize the BOCC Chair to sign the grant agreement contract.

Approve County staff to begin procurement processes for construction of a solar array per the scope of work.

Approve County staff to create a new funding line structure for the Community Investment Fund (CIF) to receive Lydia B. Stokes grant dollars and future utility savings dollars for the life of the solar panel array.

Approve County staff to expand the Alachua County Energy Efficiency Program (ACEEP) to include homeowners in EMPOWER Coalition partner neighborhoods.

Approve County staff to begin procurement proceedings for a contractor to administer CIF per ACEEP and appropriate requirements.

Authorize the Chair to sign the attached Resolution.

Prior Board Motions:

25-00541: Alachua County BOCC reaffirms commitment to EMPOWER Coalition goals through BOCC Chair signature on EMPOWER Coalition Collaboration Letter (July 8, 2025).

24-00100: Alachua County BOCC authorizes County staff to continue to work with the EMPOWER Coalition, during Joint Meeting with the City of Gainesville. City and County staff sign a green jobs

partnership letter of collaboration to assist in the pursuit of grant requests related to the EMPOWER Coalition project objectives related to green jobs (January 22, 2024)

23-00752: Board heard update on the U.S. Department of Energy EMPOWER Coalition technical assistance grant (December 12, 2023)

Fiscal Note:

Accepting the award would provide Alachua County BOCC with \$110,000 in private funding for the project. In return, the County would commit 90% of dollars which are currently being spent on the utilities of that building to a Community Investment Fund that is administered through the existing Alachua County Energy Efficiency Program and associated contracts. The County would retain 10% of the saved utility dollars for its general use. The program would parallel the existing ECIP fund which is managed by the Resiliency Office.

Strategic Guide:

Social and Economic Opportunity

Background:

The EMPOWER Coalition is a community-driven initiative to transition Alachua County, Florida, to 100% clean, reliable energy for all residents. The U.S. Department of Energy selected the project for a technical assistance grant to support the development of a roadmap for this transition through their Communities LEAP program, of which the EMPOWER Coalition was an inaugural awardee in 2022, and awarded grant for a second time in 2024 due to clear program successes. This second award (the Second Cohort) is still ongoing.

From 2022 through 2024, the EMPOWER Coalition engaged with neighborhood groups, nonprofits, and local government to build relationships and learn together with the help of DOE technical experts. Over the course of several engagement sessions, coalition members and local residents learned about energy issues and determined which questions and possible solutions they wanted the DOE technical assistance to help address, with a focus on helping low-income families move towards energy resiliency.

These community conversations serve as the foundation for the goals of the Communities LEAP Second Cohort, which are:

- Develop and pilot an institutional solar pilot program,
- Establish a Community Investment Fund,
- Expand five green job pipelines,
- Explore the potential for resilience hubs, and
- Engage and empower the Coalition partners of Springhill and Sugarhill, Greater Duval, and SWAG communities

The critical community engagement work, the technically and economically robust project plans, and the dedication of EMPOWER Coalition members to moving the project forward won the attention of Lydia B. Stokes Foundation trustees. Alachua County was invited to submit an application for funding assistance which would allow us to pursue the first two goals of the second Communities LEAP cohort: the development of an institutional solar pilot program and its associated Community Investment Fund.

The proposed institutional solar pilot program would construct a small solar array on the roof of the current County facility located at 915 SE 5th St, Gainesville, FL 32601. The existence of the solar array

would reduce the utility costs of the building by an estimated \$24/day, for a savings of over \$8,000/year. 10% of these savings would be designated for general County use, with 90% of the funds allocated to the Community Investment Fund, which would be managed through an amendment to the existing ACEEP contract.

The proposed Community Investment Fund would build on the extensive community engagement work that is currently being led by the Cultural Arts Coalition (CAC) in their role as EMPOWER Coalition partners. Over the past two years, the CAC has helped developed significant organizational capacity among neighborhood residents in the EMPOWER Coalition's three partner neighborhoods. They have hosted regular meetings where they discuss the energy future of the community, and residents have (through a \$15,000 grant, also from the Lydia B. Stokes Foundation) made decisions on how to allocate weatherization funding to community members. The Community Investment Fund would be managed by the County through an amendment to its ACEEP contract. This amendment would include a provision that requires ACEEP's contractor to work with residents from these neighborhood organizations to identify eligible households, improving local participation in the program while reducing contractor costs associated with program outreach.

The attached statement of work includes additional details around the planned pilot program, including the installation, the proposed Community Investment Fund, and an update on the work conducted by the CAC. Also included is the grant agreement paperwork and the original proposal which was submitted to the Lydia B. Stokes Foundation.