



Community and Economic Development in North Carolina and Beyond Blog: More Federal Funding Available to Grow Clean Energy Small Businesses

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Back in September, this blog highlighted a new program from US EPA to work with small businesses nationwide to develop and commercialize technologies that tackle critical environmental problems: the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) Program. Now the US Department of Energy's Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy has launched its own program to assist small businesses, the Small Business Vouchers (SBV) pilot program. The Small Business Vouchers program links small businesses who promote clean energy technology with the DOE National Laboratories.

The National Labs are science and technology centers that house some of the world's most powerful lasers, fastest supercomputers and talented researchers. The Small Business Vouchers program is part of a broader National Lab Impact Initiative. According to DOE, the mission of the Lab Impact Initiative is to significantly increase the industrial impact of DOE national labs on the U.S. clean energy sector. The team will accomplish this mission through increasing and enhancing lab-private sector relationships, increasing and streamlining access to national lab capabilities, and demonstrating the value of lab-developed science and technology.

This month, the Small Business Vouchers program selected 33 small businesses for lab collaboration. This is the first round of funding for the pilot program, with about \$6.7 million to be distributed. The businesses come from 20 different states and will work with nine different National Labs. Each business will receive a voucher ranging from \$50,000 to \$300,000.

Vouchers for national lab's expertise will be available in nine key advanced energy fields:

- **Water:** Work in the water area will focus on developing technologies to convert the ocean's waves, as well as other sources, such as canals, into clean, cost-competitive energy;
- **Wind:** Work in the wind area will focus on eliminating market barriers for the adoption of commercial wind turbines by improving prediction models;
- **Bioenergy:** Work in the bioenergy area will focus on improving methods and processes for converting cellulosic biomass into usable bio-based chemicals, made from renewable, domestic components;
- **Solar:** Work in the solar area will focus on developing new, more efficient solar collectors, as well as integrating new solar technologies into the grid;
- **Buildings:** Work in the buildings area will focus on improving the efficiency and cost effectiveness of building energy systems, including HVAC systems;
- **Vehicles:** Work in the vehicles area will focus on improved technologies for making vehicles safer, more efficient, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions;
- **Fuel Cells:** Work in the fuel cells area will focus on developing several projects, whose aims include creating cheaper, more durable fuel cells;
- **Geothermal:** Work in the geothermal area will focus on improving tools used to access and test geothermal power;
- **Advanced Manufacturing:** Work in the advanced manufacturing area will focus on reducing manufacturing costs, optimizing methods and evaluating new processes in applications for 3D printing, LED devices, sensors, catalyst development, and bio-derived lignin, as well as developing pathways toward zero-emissions fuel cell electric vehicles.

A second round of applications for the Small Business Vouchers program is open now and will close on April 10, 2016. DOE anticipates giving a total of 100 vouchers totaling \$20 million between the two funding rounds this year.



These types of federal assistance programs can greatly enhance the ability of small businesses to be successful in their clean energy missions, which in turn can help strengthen local economies.