

Notice of Availability of Grant

New Jersey Board of Public Utilities Availability of Grant

The New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (“BPU” or “Board”) hereby announces the availability of a grant as authorized under N.J.S.A. 48:2-29.39 and N.J.S.A. 46:30B-74(b).

Name of program: PAYMENT ASSISTANCE FOR GAS AND ELECTRIC (“PAGE”)

Purpose:

To administer a program that provides assistance towards payment of electric and/or natural gas utility bills for households seeking aid. The beneficiaries of such assistance will be public utility customers, hereinafter referred to generally as “Limited Income Households” and more specifically defined as follows:

- 1) New Jersey households with zero-to-moderate income; and
- 2) Facing a financial hardship that includes a recent documented notice of overdue payment for natural gas and/or electric service on the utility bill for which payment assistance is being sought.

Further, where practicable, if a PAGE applicant is income eligible for New Jersey’s Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (“LIHEAP”) or the Universal Service Fund (“USF”) program, the applicant should be directed to apply for those programs first in order to maximize total available benefits prior to seeking additional aid from the PAGE program. Additionally, the program structure is such that no more than one (1) PAGE grant for electric service and one PAGE grant for gas service may be provided to any applicant within a 12-month period.

Priority will be given to customers who are in danger of disconnection of service or who have had their utility services disconnected.

Categorical eligibility for this program should be used where possible by the Program Administrator if it is demonstrated that the customer has recently participated in another income-based program in New Jersey, such as the USF or LIHEAP programs.

Eligibility:

A “Grantee” shall be a nonprofit energy assistance organization, designated by the Board after demonstrating the ability to coordinate distributions to Limited Income Households statewide. Grantees must provide documentation of:

- 1) federal and State government funding;
- 2) any funding approved by the Board;
- 3) a complete accounting of all actual or anticipated expenses and disbursements;
- 4) a comprehensive plan to disburse any funds received pursuant to this program; and
- 5) a comprehensive plan to provide the Board with a report containing details about the program’s operation.

Goal:

To aid eligible Limited Income Households with assistance toward the payment of gas and/or electric bills in order to avoid disconnection of service, or restore service, which may include the cost of security deposits and reconnection fees.

Money from the Unclaimed Utility Deposits Trust Fund (“Trust Fund”) will be made available to a non-profit energy assistance organization to aid eligible electric and/or natural gas customers with “the payment of expenses associated with the restoration of electric or gas service, or to prevent the termination of electric or gas service provided to utility ratepayers seeking assistance.”

Funding received by the chosen Grantee must be split into two (2) separate accounts: 1) for low-income applicants (at or below the LIHEAP income limits); and 2) for moderate income applicants (above the LIHEAP income limits up to moderate income).

Equally important is ensuring the integrity of the program and consistency of eligibility criteria.

Additionally, the Grantee shall provide information to PAGE qualifying households regarding state and utility-sponsored energy efficiency and renewable energy programs that are designed to serve low to moderate income households

Background:

N.J.S.A. 48:2-29.39 authorizes the Board to designate an established statewide non-profit energy assistance organization to receive supplemental funding from unclaimed property held by the State's electric and gas utilities pursuant to N.J.S.A. 46:30B-74. N.J.S.A. 46:30B-74 directs the administrator of the Trust Fund to provide 75% of the money in the Trust Fund to the New Jersey Statewide Heating Assistance and Referral for Energy Services ("NJSHARES"), or to another statewide nonprofit energy assistance organization designated by the Board within 45 days of the receipt of such funds.

GRANT SOLICITATION PROCESS

Amount of funds available in the program:

N.J.S.A. 46:30B-74b states that unless the administrator deems it unadvisable, the administrator shall direct 75% of the funds in the Unclaimed Utility Deposits Trust Fund towards a non-profit entity to help electric or gas customers pay their utility bills to avoid shutoff or restore service. The amount of funds available from the unclaimed utility deposits may vary considerably from year-to-year. It is currently estimated based on historical averages that approximately \$2.5M will be available in early 2024; however, annual grants have been as low as \$800,000 and as high as \$4.5M. This contract will be a three-year contract.

Entities which may apply for funding under the program:

Nonprofit organizations [(501(c)(3) organizations] with service location(s) located, or to be located, in New Jersey, that have experience in administering financial energy assistance programs.

An application may only be submitted by the eligible agency/entity itself.

Qualifications needed by an applicant to be considered for the program:

Applicants for funding must have demonstrated staff and resource capability, and experience with financial energy assistance programs.

Proposal instructions:

Inquiries: Please direct email inquiries regarding this Notice to utility.assistance@bpu.nj.gov no later than 5:00 p.m. on July 24, 2023. Answers to all questions submitted by this date will be posted by 5:00 p.m. on August 1, 2023 on the BPU website at www.nj.gov/bpu.

Proposals due: All proposals must be received no later than 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on September 15, 2023.

Proposals must be emailed in MSWord or pdf format to board.secretary@bpu.nj.gov and utility.assistance@bpu.nj.gov.

Proposal preparation:

This section of the solicitation is designed to guide applicants in organizing their proposals in a consistent fashion so as to facilitate evaluation. Applicants should demonstrate within the relevant sections how their proposed program meets or exceeds the goals and purposes identified above. Each proposal should include the following sections:

- a) Program description and proposed scope of work;
- b) Program eligibility and recertification requirements;
- c) A description of previous experience administering financial assistance programs;
- d) Methods of informing the target audience of the grant availability;
- e) Methods for informing grant recipients about energy efficiency and renewable energy programs for which they may be eligible;
- f) Explanation of applicant's ability to work with the gas and electric utilities;

- g) Grant distribution methodology;
- h) Process for ensuring eligibility requirements are met;
- i) Explanation of how the proposed work will be managed and evaluated for effectiveness along with appropriate metrics;
- j) Security measures that will be taken to protect client data by the Grantee and any partnering organizations;
- k) A copy of the applicant's most recent annual report, operating budget, and audited financial statement;
- l) A description of financial controls that will be used to protect public funding;
- m) Three-year program budget estimating \$2.5 million received per year, including a breakdown of estimated administrative costs, a description of the sources and schedule of all funding, and a detailed explanation of how the grant will be used;
- n) Narrative explanation and table indicating applicant's ability to adjust program costs based on variable funding from year to year in \$1M-\$5M increments;
- o) For consortium/contractual costs, provide an estimate of the individuals/organizations with whom these consortium/contractual arrangements will be made;
- p) Program staff contacts with the title of each person to work on the program and his/her estimated hourly cost;
- q) Other costs (for example, consultant, specific supplies, and travel) must also be included; and
- r) A list of all federal and state funds received in the last 5 years.
- s) During the past ten years, has an internal or external audit, investigation, or review of the applicant found any deficiencies, theft, or wrongdoing by the applicant, a subcontractor to the applicant or a current or former employee with regard to the use of program or grant funding? If so, please explain in detail and provide any relevant documentation.
- t) During the past ten years has a contract, grant or award relating to an assistance program run by the applicant been terminated prior to the expiration of the contract, grant or award? This question applies whether termination was initiated by the applicant or another party. If so, please explain in detail and provide any relevant documentation.

Proposal timeline:

Applicants shall submit a "timeline" and include projected dates for the distribution of financial assistance based upon the receipt of grant money for each fiscal year. Applicants must include a statement confirming their organization will be able to commence the distribution of grants to Limited Income Households no later than January 2, 2024. Contract overlap with an existing PAGE administrator may occur to ensure a smooth program transition.

Program team:

Proposals should include an organizational chart listing all team members, including the program manager, subcontractors, and other sponsors involved in the program, showing their roles, responsibilities, and salaries. Proposals should also state the program team's individual and combined expertise that will enable successful implementation of the program.

Progress reporting and metrics for evaluation:

Monthly reports are required indicating number of applicants and recipients, broken down by utility company, municipality and zip code. Quarterly progress reports, accounting for all funds received and spent, will be required, including but not limited to the number and amount of financial assistance grants distributed to Limited Income Households by each electric and/or gas utility and when the grants are distributed. Quarterly reports shall also include actual program administrative costs for the applicable quarter. Within one year of receiving the grant award, the nonprofit energy assistance organization shall issue a comprehensive report to the Board which provides the number of applicants applying for household utility assistance grants, the number of households receiving utility assistance grants, the average amount of assistance provided, the average gross income of households receiving assistance, the methods and procedures used for the verification of income or financial hardship, and any other information as required by the Board.

Evaluation criteria:

Proposals will be reviewed and scored by a Grant Review Committee consisting of Board Staff according to the following criteria:

- General program approach and plans to meet the requirements of the Notice of Availability of Grants (20 pts);

- Detailed approach and plans to expeditiously perform the services required by the scope of work of this Notice of Availability of Grants (20 pts);
- Detailed program budget and cost effectiveness relative to grant award (20 pts);
- Documented experience with administration of assistance programs and their demonstrated results (20 pts);
 - Qualifications & experience of key personnel (10 pts); and
- Ability to work with electric and gas utilities to implement a program on a statewide basis (10 pts).

The State of New Jersey and the Board of Public Utilities reserve the right to conduct interviews with applicants or request additional details and clarification, if necessary.

Grant award:

The Grant Review Committee will recommend funding commitment decisions, as described above, to the Board. The Board may reject or accept in part or in whole the recommendations for the funding award made by the evaluation committee. Grant funds will be awarded by the Board to the program(s) deemed to be most beneficial to the State according to the application materials submitted pursuant to this Notice of Availability of Grant. The Board reserves the right to make no award if in its sole discretion no acceptable proposal is received. Applicants shall receive a Notice of Award or letter declining such award after Board approval of the PAGE grant, on or before November 1, 2023.

The Board's decision will be communicated to applicants by the Division of Customer Assistance. Applicants shall designate a program manager in the proposal who shall become the point of contact with the Division of Customer Assistance.

After Board approval of the award, a grant agreement will be developed between the Board and the Grantee. Applicants will be required to comply with Treasury Circular Letter 07-05-OMB, Grant Agreements-Agency Contracts which provides some but not all of the terms and conditions that will be made part of the grant agreement. To download a copy of Circular Letter 07-05-OMB and the template agreement, please go to <http://www.state.nj.us/infobank/circular/cir0705b.pdf>.

Audit requirement:

This grant is covered by the audit requirements of the Department of the Treasury Circular Letter 15-08-OMB, Single Audit Policy for Recipients of Federal Grants, State Grants and State Aid available at: http://www.state.nj.us/infobank/circular/cir1508_omb.pdf.