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LBNL-ETA Comments responding to the CEC's "Program for Increasing Participation from the Private Sector for Grants in California"

Dear Laurie, October 6th, 2016

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments from Lawrence Berkeley National Lab (Berkeley Lab), Energy Technologies Area (ETA) in response to the "Program for Increasing Participation from the Private Sector for Grants in California."

Berkeley Lab supports California's ambitious policy goals and shares a deeply-rooted commitment to these energy goals. We have been privileged to support the State of California in research, design, development and demonstration (RDD&D) of innovation technologies, program design and evaluation, code compliance strategies, water-energy dynamics, demand response and other research efforts.

We respect California's RDD&D funding as unique in the world. At the fulcrum of California's research efforts and those of the Department of Energy, and working in partnership with a number of small and large industry partners across the research portfolio, Berkeley Lab has perspectives that may assist the CEC in its effort to encourage broader industry participation.

We have organized our comments around the CEC's September 22nd Workshop Agenda questions/format:

CEC Question #1 - What are some concerns and challenges facing the private sector, including small businesses and entrepreneurs, when considering applying for grant funding opportunities?:

• The CEC's Timelines have recently varied significantly from solicitation to solicitation. Allocating and/or scheduling resources in preparation of an anticipated solicitation is essential in preparation for proposal development. The CEC could provide more specificity on solicitation release dates and standardize the amount of time to respond to solicitation (ex. three months) to better allow the private sector - particularly small business and entrepreneurs - to plan their (often limited) resources accordingly amidst competing opportunities and constraints.

• Complete EPIC Proposal applications require the development of many highly detailed attachments, many of which small businesses and entrepreneurs are often not prepared or capable of completing - particularly as a prime applicant. This can, in part, be addressed through the increased use of two phase/stage (Pre-Application & Full Application) solicitations (ex. GFO-16-302 & GFO-15-325) thereby reducing the labor investment/financial risk of applying.

• Match funding requirements and cost-share requirements are particularly challenging for most SME's and entrepreneurs. As a result, larger industrial partners with the financial/resource ability to commit match funding are often preferred/required for a competitive submission. This is further compounded by the scoring preference towards cash-in-hand match funding.

• While the CEC provides LinkedIn groups for solicitations and Lists of Workshop Attendees, Private Industry could benefit from a more direct "match making" platform on the CEC's individual solicitation websites; particularly as LinkedIn usage is not ubiquitous across many sectors.

The CEC could host a public table or database connected with each solicitation that allows interested parties to register and provide basic contact information, technical capabilities and desired collaboration role. Such a system could greatly ease and facilitate partnering - particularly for SMEs and entrepreneurs. (e.g. ARPA-E often uses such a tool).

CEC Question #2 - How can the California Energy Commission better increase awareness of the research programs to California private sector companies?:

â€¢ Circulating anticipated and/or draft funding solicitations with relevant industrial groups throughout the State significantly in advance could help socialize these opportunities with potential project stakeholders in advance of a solicitationâ€™s release. This would allow potential collaborators - particularly those less familiar with the EPIC process - to better consider participation in the solicitation before the critical proposal development timeframe following a solicitationâ€™s release.

This is particularly pertinent for solicitations in which a city or regional government is sought as a partner where extensive partnering approvals may be required by the government.

Comments Sections #3: What are some ideas to encourage private sector companies to apply for research funding?

â€¢ Ensuring solicitations address a broader array of TRL-levels will increase the variety and number of stakeholders; particularly increasing the number of R&D-focused SMEs/start-ups to apply.

While the future CEC-funded CalSEED program addresses this need, additionally, the CalSEED pipeline of SMEs and entrepreneurs could be used as a pool of potential partners for outreach and encouraging to apply for CECâ€™s solicitations.

â€¢ The CEC could host subject matter-specific workshops; inviting potential applicants and partners to profile their products, interests and needs. Similarly, we would encourage the CEC host a workshop with the cleantech investment community - Berkeley Lab would be happy to help facilitate introductions, as desired.

â€¢ The CEC should ensure it works with relevant industry consortia to develop the Triennial Plan(s) to ensure the resultant EPIC solicitations align with the interests of the industry participants in the sectors the CEC seeks to address/engage.

â€¢ The CEC could additionally engage the Stateâ€™s leading incubators, accelerators and investment community in the development of the next Triennial Investment Plan. This would ensure better alignment between the outcomes of the CEC-funded research, commercialization pathways and subsequent funding.

â€¢ Similar to the Department of Energyâ€™s Small Business Vouchers Pilot (SBV) many SMEs and Entrepreneurs would benefit from separate CEC funding for lab research resources to support testing and validation.

Comments Sections #4: Besides grant funding, what else can the CEC do to help California private sector companies to be successful?

â€¢ The CEC has recently trialed submission limitations (e.g. 16-305 and 16-304; â€œPrimes cannot be Subsâ€ and â€œlimited number of awardsâ€). However, due to the challenge of applying as a Prime applicant, we suspect

it is likely that this will decrease the total number of applications rather than expand the pool of applicants.

The CEC could provide prescriptive partnering guidelines and proposal scoring incentives to include SMEs or other specifically desired private sector entities; particularly relevant on larger demonstration solicitations. Partnering with larger prime entities such as national labs or universities where SMEs are subcontractors will lower the participation barrier for SMEs by reducing the administrative burden of full proposal development for SMEs.

• The CEC could provide a database of various user facilities (such as LBNL's FLEXLAB) related to the CEC's research agenda. Potential applicants could solicit/engage with these facilities in the development of a proposal.

Should you need any clarification on the comments above we would be delighted to provide it.

Berkeley Lab looks forward to continuing to engage with the CEC and other key stakeholders in helping increase private sector participation in EPIC. It has been our privilege to work with the State of California on critical issues affecting the State and our environment. As a representative member of our country's National Laboratory system, Berkeley Lab greatly values the opportunity to participate as a stakeholder in this process.