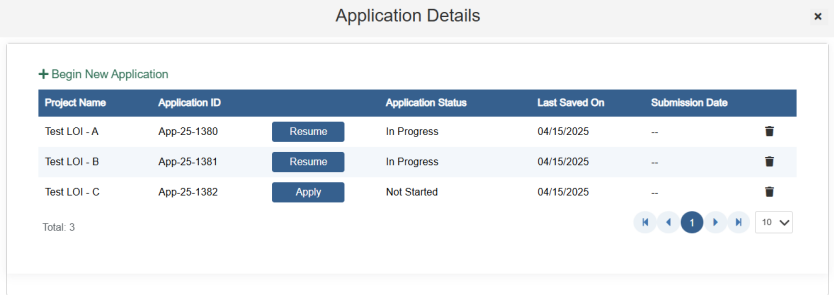


RFP Questions & Answers
Conservation Applied Research and Development Grant Program
Perform Field study or Demonstration,
Conduct Market or Saturation Study,
Produce a White Paper, or Research Data Centers
COMM-CARD02-20250520

#	Question	Response	Posted
1.	Regarding this wording: "The maximum amount available for this Funding Topic for a white paper study or similar study approach to that is \$70,000 per proposed project. If another study approach is used within this Funding Topic, there is no maximum amount stipulated." Is the \$70,000 limit regarding the overall award limit or just a cap on what can be spent on white papers? Additionally, are there any other study approaches that have a funding cap limit? Can you provide some additional clarity on the wording of "or similar study approaches" and "If another study approach is used"? Do you have specific study approaches other than white papers that are capped at \$70,000?	The \$70,000 limit is the maximum amount available per proposed white paper or similar study approach within Funding Topic D. There is no maximum amount prescribed per proposed project that utilizes a different study approach (e.g. market study, etc.) under Funding Topic D. After the Department reviews NOIs and/or proposals, the Department may reach out to responders for clarification of specific NOIs or specific proposals. If a Responder is contacted with a clarification request, the Responder should respond within 5 business days. If the Responder does not respond within 5 business days, NOIs and proposals will be evaluated as submitted by the respective NOI or proposal deadline. The Department may reach out clarifying a requested budget within Funding Topic D if the Department needs clarification regarding study approach or requested budget considering the maximum amount available for Funding Topic D for a white paper study or similar study approach is \$70,000 per proposed project.	6/18/2025
2.	While I understand this project would result in a grant agreement, and profit would not be allowed, does the same restriction hold true for subcontractors/consultants? My organization is a for-profit company; if we are a subcontractor to an eligible non-profit prime, can we charge a fee for our services, in other words, can we make profit?	Commerce will be in contract with awarded grantees. If subcontractors are part of a grantee's workplan and budget in a fully executed grant contract, we would expect that a procurement process has been followed and vendors are selected based on criteria consistent with the procurement process. Grantees must determine if they will allow fees when selecting vendors for subcontracted services. Commerce will not bar subcontractors from charging fees.	6/18/2025
3.	What is the length of the NOI?	There are character limits to the responses under each of the NOI questions in the GrantVantage grant submission portal. If responders maximize the characters allowed under all questions the entire NOI length is approximately equivalent to 2 pages.	6/18/2025

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4.	Can entities/organizations have multiple accounts in GrantVantage to submit more than one response?	In the GrantVantage grant application submission portal, only one account (Applicant Profile) should be created per entity or organization. Entities and organizations can have multiple users and are able to submit more than one NOI response. Grant application submission instructions, Exhibit B GrantVantage Responder User Guide, are available on the Department’s Request for Proposals Webpage (https://mn.gov/commerce/business/rfp.jsp). Pages 6-10 detail how to create your entity’s or organization’s Applicant Profile and establish multiple users associated with that Applicant Profile. Entities and organizations are also able to submit more than one NOI response per account. Please see page 12 of the user guide for instructions on how to start a new NOI response if submitting multiple responses. When you open the funding announcement in GrantVantage, you will be able to click “apply” or “resume.” The pop-up window shown below will appear with “+Begin New Application” option, as well as a list of applications started or submitted by your entity or organization. See the screenshot below:  Further clarification: In Stage 2, please remember that you should use the same Applicant Profile for your entity or organization to submit full proposal(s). If organizations have questions on the use of the GrantVantage grant submission portal, please submit them to energy.contracts@state.mn.us.	6/18/2025

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5.	We submitted NOIs under Category D – Data Centers. If we were to request approval to shift one or both projects to another funding topic, would Commerce plan to review them for that category and provide an “encourage” or “discourage” determination, taking into account the removal of Category D? We would certainly proceed with the understanding of the constraints introduced by HF 16 and the existing ECO exemption language. We had already incorporated those considerations into our strategies, but we would welcome your insight into whether there is still interest in research on data centers that fall below those thresholds (e.g., under 100 MW, or under 20 MW).	If a responder were to request approval to resubmit a NOI originally submitted under funding topic D to a different funding topic, Commerce will review and provide an “encourage” or “discourage” to full proposal determination notification as long as the request is received by the Final Day to Submit Questions about RFP October 8, 2025 at 5:00 p.m. This process will only be eligible for NOIs originally submitted and automatically discouraged under funding topic D due to the circumstances of funding topic D’s removal from the RFP. Department staff understand that a responder would only proceed to resubmit an NOI under a different funding topic through this process if it has incorporated constraints introduced by HF 16 and existing ECO exemption language, but the responder believes the energy savings opportunity are beneficial to pursue relative to utility ECO programs and it is an appropriate fit within the other funding topic. Further, since the notification of discouragement was already provided for funding topic D, the Notification of Encourage/Discourage to Full Proposal date of September 17, 2025, does not apply to any NOIs resubmitted to a different funding topic through this process.	9/3/2025

#	Question	Response	Posted
6.	I am seeking clarification regarding budget instructions for indirect expenses on CARD proposals. The RFP instructs applicants to budget for indirect costs and provide an explanation, the organization's rate percentage, and explanation of rate base. The University's negotiated indirect cost rates agreement is 54% for research. For many State of MN grants, indirect costs are disallowed for the University. In others, a reduced rate is used. And some allow the full rate, often depending on the funding source. Can you please advise, what indirect costs are permitted for University of Minnesota proposals?	Minnesota Statutes 16B.98 states that “As a condition of receiving a grant from an appropriation of state funds, the recipient of the grant must agree to minimize administrative costs.” Furthermore, the Department “is responsible for negotiating appropriate limits to these costs so that the state derives the optimum benefit for grant funding.” Therefore: • If the hourly labor rate does not include indirect costs (such as fringe or overhead), those items must be included as separate line items in the budget spreadsheet and the proposal must include a breakdown of the indirect costs as outlined on page 37 of the RFP. • Per the RFP page 37, if indirect costs is one of the line items in the budget spreadsheet, the Responder should include as part of the proposal: 1) a brief explanation of typically what is included in the indirect costs; 2) the organization’s indirect percentage rate; and 3) an explanation of what the current rate is based on (including how it was calculated, when this rate came into effect, and when it was last reviewed and by whom). ○ The above information should be provided regardless of if the indirect costs are its own budget line or incorporated into the direct labor costs as fully loaded labor rates. • Per the RFP pages 41 – 42, the budget is evaluated based on the proposal evaluation criteria, and overall proposals are selected through a competitive evaluation process. • Finally, prior to execution of a selected grant, additional analyses of project budgets are completed and if warranted may be a point of negotiation. All Responders should provide any indirect cost information if you propose to include indirect costs in your budget, as well as consider the entire response to question 6 when determining your indirect costs if needed to carry out the work in your proposal(s). Beyond this, as a competitive process, you need to use your best judgment regarding hourly rates.	10/17/2025

#	Question	Response	Posted
7.	We recently learned of RFP COMM_CARD02_20250520. Unfortunately, the RFP describes the two-Stage process for participating in this opportunity. While the deadline to submit the Stage 1 Notice of Intent has passed, would we still be able to complete the necessary steps and submit a Stage 1 Proposal to your team for consideration and eventual participation in Stage 2?	No, the NOI process for this RFP is closed. In order to submit an application in Stage 2 a respondent must have submitted an NOI in Stage 1. To receive future notices of RFPs, subscribe to Email Updates (https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/MNCOMM/subscriber/new?topic_id=MNCOMM_41) from the Department and select “Request for Proposals” as one of your subscriber preferences. Be sure to add the Minnesota Department of Commerce (MNCommerce@public.govdelivery.com) to your Safe Senders list. Commerce typically publishes one or more RFP(s) annually, based on a review of current ECO needs with input from utilities and other stakeholders. All RFPs are publicly posted, often during the spring, although not necessarily. Competition for funding is high and all proposals undergo evaluation based on explicit criteria outlined in the RFP.	10/17/2025
8.	This question is in regard to Section 4, Part 2 – “Project Impact” (page 28 of 47) in the RFP. Since our deliverable is a white paper, we weren’t sure if the Attachment 1 CARD Savings Grid Table Template spreadsheet (attached) is required or if there’s any specific guidance on how you’d like us to approach it in that context. Could you please clarify whether this section should be included, and if so, what kind of content or framing would be most helpful?	Please note the following language from the RFP page 43: The following attachments are incorporated into this RFP and must be completed and submitted during Stage 2 for full grant proposals to be considered complete. No completed attachments are required during Stage 1. • Attachment 1: CARD Savings Grid Table Template • Attachment 2: CARD Scope of Work Template • Revised Attachment 3-1: CARD Budget Template • Attachment 4: Exceptions Form • Attachment 5: Conflict of Interest The guidance available for completing the CARD Savings Grid Table Template is available in the full RFP and the attachment itself. See pages 28-31 of the RFP.	10/17/2025
9.	Is match funding from the primary organization submitting the proposal required or optional? If required, what is the minimum percentage?	Matching funds are not required. Although matching funds are an optional component of the budget, it is part of the budget evaluation criteria and can help bolster the proposal section 6 “budget” score as indicated within the RFP on pg 42.	10/17/2025

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10.	In CARD's budget template, it appears that the summary row (row 53), does not add in the responder non-labor costs. Meaning the true total project cost is not shown anywhere in the sheet. The summary row (53) adds the responder labor (row 20) instead of the responder total (row 31) to the subcontractor total.	An addendum will be issued with a revised budget template that should be the document submitted within the full proposal as soon as possible that will correct this issue. The revised budget template will be named, or named similar to, ATTACHMENT 3_CARD Budget Template_revised.	10/17/2025
11.	Could you please confirm whether there are any page limits for the various proposal sections that require narratives, or if there are recommended limits we should follow? Are there any formatting requirements or preferences for narrative sections (i.e. font and font size, margins, page numbers, footnotes, table/figure/image formatting, cover letters etc.)? (Pages 26-39, Stage 2 Full Proposal Application Submission)	From page 26 of the RFP “The proposal application should be succinct and to the point but address each of the subjects clearly and completely. A disordered or confusing proposal will result in a lower evaluation score.” Additionally, the acceptable document types, for upload to the GrantVantage funder portal, submitted in response to the applicant questions are listed in the funder portal and in the RFP. Review each of the full proposal sections within the RFP pages 26-39 Stage 2 Full Proposal Application Submission for document type(s).	10/17/2025
12.	For full proposal evaluation and scoring, the RFP states that “All responses received by the deadline will be evaluated by representatives of the Department of Commerce.” Will utilities be involved in the proposal review process at all, and is there any conflict with Responders or Responder Teams reaching out to utilities for proposal development support? (Page 40, Full Proposal Evaluation and Scoring)	Unlike in the NOI phase, at this point in the RFP process, Responders are allowed to contact utilities to discuss or to inquire about utility interest in a project the Responder intends to submit to full proposal. This should not involve soliciting financial contributions from utilities for your project since utility assessments fund CARD. Nevertheless, a specific utility may independently decide to provide a letter of support for your project, or to offer in-kind or other support. Page 33 of the RFP indicates that you may upload letters of support from any individual or entity that believes the proposed research project is worthwhile, and/or the results will be valuable to ECO programs in Minnesota. There is not a conflict with Responders or Responder teams reaching out to utilities for a letter of support.	10/17/2025
13.	Is the 5% retainage on the entire project cost, or will the retainage be 5% of each invoice?	The 5% retainage is on the entire project cost. Each invoice is paid in full until 95% of the amount due on this contract has been paid.	10/17/2025

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14.	If the core methods and technology of a project identified do not change, how much leniency will the Department grant if the project site is located at a different place than those identified in an NOI, for instance at a generic commercial property instead of an educational, engineering, or government entity?	The full application will still be considered if there is a change to field site location within the identified building sector (i.e. commercial, residential, industrial, etc.) from what was proposed in the NOI. It is also okay to change the building sector if after the NOI is submitted it is determined a different building sector is a better fit for the research project after full proposal development, considering the RFP. However, the NOI was encouraged or discouraged to submit to full proposal based on the submitted NOI content. So, you should clearly explain within the full proposal the rationale of why that change was made to justify the logic.	10/17/2025
15.	Can a resource be provided that lists all the active 'consumer-owned utility' initiatives in Minnesota, as referenced on pg 8 of 47 in the RFP?	No, there is not an exhaustive resource that lists all the active “consumer-owned utility” initiatives in Minnesota, however a couple ideas to get at some of the information regarding consumer owned utility initiatives, though broader than this funding opportunity, in Minnesota would be to: • Engage with Minnesota consumer owned utilities directly • Review past CARD projects for engagement or implications for consumer owned utilities specifically. See page 8 of the RFP for instructions on how to access research. Conservation Research & Development / Minnesota Department of Commerce - Energy (https://mn.gov/commerce/energy/conserving-energy/applied-research-development/) • Review Home Minnesota Rural Electric Association (MREA) (https://www.mrea.org/) • Review Minnesota Municipal Utilities Association MMUA (https://www.mmua.org/) • Review Rural Energy Transitions — Chan Lab (https://www.chan-lab.umn.edu/rural-energy-transitions)	10/17/2025
16.	How does the state Commerce Department, and other Departments, dispose of its IT equipment? Can a copy of those procedures or contracts be provided?	This question is outside of the scope of this RFP, and the Department is answering questions regarding this RFP.	10/17/2025

#	Question	Response	Posted
17.	Can a list of state-owned computer server equipment for its datacenters be provided (excluding personal computers, laptops and workstations), to include # of units per specific model or configuration?	This question is outside of the scope of this RFP, and the Department is answering questions regarding this RFP.	10/17/2025
18.	Can CARD provide the State's planned refresh cycle and obsolescence of its IT servers?	This question is outside of the scope of this RFP, and the Department is answering questions regarding this RFP.	10/17/2025
19.	Because the cost of new computer gear far exceeds the cost of previously used - but still functional - equipment, the size and number of innovative IT pilot deployments may be limited due to the excessive costs and unwarranted fears of private and public sector IT personnel. Can CARD identify a state agency that would have an interest in donating used IT equipment (no less than 100 servers) that could be refurbished and either: 1) returned for its own, more efficient and extended lifecycle use, or 2) be offered to other governmental, tribal or non-profit entities for their own free or low budget, highly efficient and beneficial use?	This question is outside of the scope of this RFP, and the Department is answering questions regarding this RFP.	10/17/2025
20.	Is CARD aware that IT equipment retrofitted, post-production, for immersion has been statistically demonstrated to significantly reduce downtime?	This question is outside of the scope of this RFP, and the Department is answering questions regarding this RFP.	10/17/2025

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21.	Can CARD provide a POC information for the Department which has the top three largest, on premise datacenter assets?	This question is outside of the scope of this RFP, and the Department is answering questions regarding this RFP.	10/17/2025
22.	After further discussion with the organization which we had planned to engage as a subcontractor if awarded funding for proposed research, we have determined that the other organization is better positioned to lead this project. Could you please advise regarding how we should formally notify the Department of the transfer in leadership for this proposal?	This type of transfer is allowed 1) as long as the project submitted in the Full Proposal stage is the same as the one submitted in the NOI stage and 2) as long as the original Responder remains on the team. Please send an email to energy.contracts@state.mn.us to notify the Department of a transfer. All NOI responses are assigned an APP ID. If you are submitting a full proposal and decide to change which partner on the team will be the Responder on the Full Proposal, your email notification must reference the NOI App ID, who the NOI Responder was, and who will be the Responder for the full proposal. In addition, affirm that the full proposal project is the same as the submitted NOI in the body of the email.	10/17/2025