

Energy Fellow Justification and Details
EERMC Full Council
01/20/2022

Education & Outreach _____ **\$7,500**

This funding will leverage an additional \$2,500 in funding from OER to support an Energy Fellow (University of Rhode Island student) for February – December 2022. The Energy Fellow will assist with outreach, engagement, and resource creation for the agricultural sector regarding energy management as well as targeting other traditionally underserved and hard to reach audiences. This is a professional development opportunity for the Energy Fellow, who will be guided by University of Rhode Island and OER staff. The farm outreach campaign will continue work supported by prior Energy Fellows to continue to engage and support the agricultural community and help them understand and invest in clean energy. This will include continuation of managing the social media accounts, expanding the database of all Rhode Island farmers, updating marketing materials for 2022 programs and supporting potential grant applicants. Additional work will be conducted to develop case studies (both written and video, conditions permitting), and attend events to engage with and support the agricultural producers of Rhode Island.

Alignment with Mission and Justification of Need

This funding directly advances the EERMC's mission to educate businesses about energy efficiency as well as the EERMC's mission to promote cost-effective energy efficiency for all Rhode Islanders. Due to the volatile nature and seasonality of many farm businesses, keeping costs low is vital to their success. Similarly, some Rhode Islanders experience a much higher energy burden (% of their income going towards energy expenses) than others. However, participation in the half-dozen available farm energy programs and Utility focused low-income programs has remained low. Conversations with stakeholders, energy program administrators, and National Grid suggest low participation is due, in part, to a lack of knowledge of available programs. The Energy Fellow will help connect farmers and other underserved segments of the agricultural sector to energy management resources and programs through online videos and written content, social media, attending professional organization meetings, conducting community outreach, and will leverage the University of Rhode Island Cooperative Extension and OER's pre-existing networks.

Benefits

Benefits to target audience: Increasing outreach to these audiences through additional and existing channels will increase understanding of energy management resources, and ultimately lead to reduced energy use and lower energy bills for these population segments. Outreach to farmers is a good opportunity to cross-market energy efficiency resources for homes and businesses and engaging underserved or overlooked segments of the population ensures that our energy efficiency work is comprehensive, equitable, and accessible to all. The Energy Fellow will also provide support in filling out grant applications, as needed, to help farmer's obtain important funds to invest in clean energy and grow their businesses.

Professional Development Benefits: The Energy Fellow will gain unique professional experience across the communications, business, planning, marketing, and management skillsets.

Overview of Workplan

The Energy Fellow will work closely with Nathan Cleveland (OER), and others at OER, URI, and other agencies as needed, to ensure all following deliverables are completed successfully. The Energy Fellow will also interface with other staff at OER, National Grid, RI Department of Environmental Management, USDA, RI Infrastructure Bank, CESA, and others as appropriate.

Deliverables:

1. Execute and expand the outreach strategy that has been developed and implemented the previous two years. This will include
 - (1) written and/or video testimonials,
 - (2) an enhanced social media presence,
 - (3) attendance at professional meetings, farmers markets, and other community events
 - (4) other outreach and engagement channels discovered through conversations with stakeholders.
2. Build upon the existing Rhode Island Farmer's database to ensure and utilize this, and other, contact lists to conduct email outreach and resource sharing directly with the agricultural community. Research and develop additional resources for other audiences as appropriate.
3. Continue to engage, support, and inform both farmers and stakeholders interested in farm energy management, as well as those in energy justice.
4. Provide quarterly updates to the EERMC Communications Subgroup and a year-end report of activities, recommendations, and next steps to the full EERMC.