California
Department of Conservation

Questions for RFI Workshops:

These questions have been developed by the Department of Conservation (DOC) and collaborating state agencies as they have come up in conversation about the development of this solicitation. No project proponent should feel obligated to answer all questions, or even any of them: these questions represent specific issue and policy areas where the DOC is seeking information to help in guiding solicitation development. The supply of answers to these questions – or not – does not affect the eligibility of any project proposal or applicant in any way.

Logistical:

1. What is the appropriate boundary for the Sierra Nevada?
2. We expect 100% of project operations to be within the state of California, and as much of the project as possible to happen within the Sierra Nevada. Are there locational or logistical considerations that deserve additional flexibility?

Award phasing and ranking:

3. Is award phasing appropriate for this solicitation?
4. If award phasing is appropriate, what is the appropriate amount of time to give applicants in Phase 1 to prepare for Phase 2?
5. What might be the key review criteria (e.g., technical merit, workplan, market transformation plan, team and resources, financial, regional economic benefits, environmental justice, etc.) used to evaluate priority projects for Phase 2 implementation (differentiating from Phase 1)?
6. Given similar proposals in different parts of the Sierra, what other priorities should be considered in the proposals?

Technological:

7. What is the appropriate technological maturity for individual components and/or integrated systems of supported projects? Should the solicitation incorporate formal references to the Department of Energy's Technology Readiness Assessment Guide, available here: https://www.directives.doe.gov/terms_definitions/technology-readiness-level)?
8. Is there a particular size facility we should expect (e.g.: throughput and/or production capacity)?
9. Should facilities be designed to process a minimum amount of forest biomass tonnage annually for a project to be eligible for funding?

Carbon-negative approach:

10. What kind of certification should be required to ensure that these projects are carbon negative?
11. What impact does the certification requirement have on the suite of carbon negative approaches considered by project proponents?
12. How should the project consider non-CO2 greenhouse gas emissions?
13. What emission sources or carbon flows should be included in the life cycle system boundary? Should avoided emissions be limited to anthropogenic CO2 removals with high certainty of permanence? Should avoided emissions in the forest ecosystem be included (e.g., carbon uptake due to forest re-growth; emissions from wildfire or decay of residues left in place; displacement of fuels or products)—and if so, which should be

considered anthropogenic? How should uncertain, probabilistic future conditions, such as drought and wildfire, be accounted for in the assessment?

14. What accounting time frame should be considered—1 year? 10 years? 100 years? Variable depending on forest characteristics or management strategies?

Budgetary and financial:

15. Due to the size and complexity of these projects, match is expected to be necessary to complete a successful project. While we don't expect to "require match," per se, we want to be sure that those additional funding sources are adequately secured to assure a successful project.
    a. What requirements should be in place to verify match funding sources?
    b. What other funding types and sources – grants, loans, state, federal, etc. – should be eligible to be leveraged to achieve a fully funded and implementable project?
    c. Conversely, are there any complementary programs that should be ineligible?

16. Should grants administered under this program be restricted to certain eligible expenses or activities (e.g. capital expenditures)? If so, should this requirement change between Phase 1 versus Phase 2 applications?

17. What kind of proof of biomass supply and/or offtake agreements might be available, and what should we expect to see to ensure that only projects with high potential success are funded? Are there existing examples of this requirement for proof that would be appropriate to follow?

18. Should "outside-the-fence" carbon negative efforts, such as sequestration activities related to carbon transportation and sequestration permitting/infrastructure, be included as eligible cost-share expenses?

Community interests:

19. What does success look like for meeting community interests and public health priorities? Are there prior programs that are model examples?

20. We welcome strong participation from California Native American Tribes through this program. Please share any information on existing tribal activities or interests relevant to this program.

21. How should we maximize outreach and community feedback for each project?

22. What best practices will help ensure these projects are part of – or create – economic development opportunities for the communities in which they're located?

23. What kind of assurances should be in place to make the most of the public safety benefits that could be achieved with these projects?

24. We expect local governments (cities and counties) to demonstrate interest in these projects and will require a letter of support with quantifiable metrics demonstrating that support. Knowing that some local governments simply have much lower capacity for these types of projects, what types of quantifiable support should we consider as meeting the threshold (e.g.: facilitation and outreach support, zoning considerations, permitting support, etc.)?

25. Are there existing draft or final CEQA/NEPA documents (e.g., environmental assessments and/or environmental impact statements) for similar or related proposals that could inform the program?

Ecological:

26. How can the State ensure that treatments funded by this project achieve fuels reduction while still maintaining other ecosystem services on which the surrounding community and environment rely?
    a. And how should the State and local government(s) ensure that the stated objectives are being met?

27. Given that fuel reduction treatments provide fire risk reduction for a limited time, how should this program ensure the continued forest health past the treatments' lifetime in a sustainable, ecologically sound, way?
28. Responding to the negative impacts of climate change through adaptation and mitigation actions requires diverse management strategies, forest structures, and species compositions: how can this program ensure the necessary diversity?
29. What types of vegetation management should be considered as ecologically sustainable sources of biomass feedstocks?
30. How should the State measure multiple benefits from these treatments, beyond just fuels reduction?
31. How should externalities (cobenefits and disbenefits) factor into project evaluation and selection?

The implementing agencies – the DOC and all collaborating state agencies – are interested in any and all input, feedback, and insights into this process. Is there anything missing from this list? Are there any implementation considerations particular to project site communities? Other things that have been missed? We look forward to your participation in the RFI workshop and also welcome your written comments. These may be addressed to: Elizabeth Betancourt, Natural and Working Lands Policy Advisor, elizabeth.betancourt@conservation.ca.gov.