

Solar Bankability Data to Advance Transactions and Access (SB-Data)  
DE-FOA-0001319  
Questions Submitted to DOE  
May 31, 2015  
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[Link to DOE SB-Data website with questions and answers](#)

Bankability Data – Clarification of term

Bankability is a term that refers to the willingness of a bank to provide financing, and could limit participation from non-banking interests. We understand the use of the term to mean that project financial viability, from both income and risk potential, is positively impacted by the ability to efficiently capture and harness data for analytical purposes for reduced administrative costs, and improved underwriting conditions by reducing risk. Reducing risk can be provided by third party companies and information made available by governmental agencies, and any number of service providers outside of banking.

**DOE Question #2**

**Question:** Can the term “bankability” include other industries and services providers outside of banking.

**DOE Response:** Per the FOA, bankability data Refers to data “across the value chain from project origination to grid integration, operations, and decommissioning – [that can] protect consumers, increase efficient pricing, and support new and existing businesses entering the solar marketplace (e.g. new financial, underwriting products, operations and maintenance services). “

Complications for Respondents – Avoidance of Endorsements, Advocacy and similar issues.

The collaboration envisioned by the FOA should involve entail a number of public agencies, trade associations, Nonprofit organizations, Service Providers, “Think Tanks”, Advisory Panels, Consulting Services, and a wide range of similar entities that all share the same concern over being seen as providing an endorsement to a product or service, or advocating for a position or policy that would undermine their neutrality. Where interoperability is not a product or service, the resulting innovations that are enabled will be. Without clear distinction and separation that blurred line will be constraint for many possible collaborators for the interconnection component.

**DOE Question #3**

**Question:** Can DOE issue a formal statement that participation in the FOA does not constitute an endorsement or advocacy for any product or service, so long as the participation is limited to establishing interoperability based on non-commercial open standards.

**DOE Response:** Participation in any working groups that are a result of this funding opportunity Announcement will be voluntary and will not constitute an endorsement of resulting products.

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**No Response from DOE**

**Question:** Can DOE accept and acknowledge a disclosure statement or certification that an entities participation in the FOA is limited to establishing interoperability based on non-commercial open standards and that no position is taken, or endorsement given, to any specific company, entity, product or service.

**No Response from DOE**

**Question:** Does the DOE have any suggestions on how to overcome this obstacle so that these entities can engage, contribute their insight and participate in a final structure.

Respondents as Competitors

The FOA indicates that DOE “intends to fund a single process, with **competitively awarded** groups working...” If the overall objective of the FOA is to develop industry awareness and collaboration, and to form a single working group, setting up the award based on competitive pricing may deny the DOE from awarding on “best value” or “best approach”, and further undermine the collaboration by introducing competition based on pricing than on contribution and collaboration. In this instance it is unproductive to create competitive teams that seek to control and constrain resources. Instead there should be a collaborative approach that encourages sharing resources and joining forces with inclusion and “best value” over exclusion and constraints for controlling pricing advantage by containing resources to “one team”.

**DOE Question #4**

**Question:** Can the DOE modify its consideration for award from “Competitively Priced” to “Best Collaborative Value” to promote mutual collaboration over price competition.

**DOE Response:** DOE will evaluate all proposals based on criteria in section IV in this solicitation. Eligibility for this FOA is described in section III. Applicants who wish to collaborate may apply with one organization as the prime awardee and others as sub-awardees. Organizations may be listed as a subrecipient on more than one application.

**No Response from DOE**

**Question:** Can entities offer their collaboration openly to all respondents so that they are not constrained to competitions that will seek to control resources to prevail over other respondents.

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Communication with other respondents - Platform

The FOA indicates the DOE intends to fund a single process and that awardees will function as an industry consortium. For success respondents will need to know what other entities are exploring submitting a response, and their specific areas of interest and possible contribution so that preliminary dialogue and initial collaboration can facilitate the process of proposing working groups and possible participants as called for.

**DOE Question #5**

**Question:** Does the DOE have a platform for respondents to find out about other respondents so that they can evaluate potential working groups and partnerships.

**DOE Response:** DOE will not release information about perspective applicants, or facilitate or endorse partnerships among perspective applicants.

Communication with other respondents - Outreach

As noted in the previous question, the best results for the meeting the objectives of the FOA is for all respondents to know about other respondents. In our case we have a number of entities and resources that we are already engaged with to promote open standards and interoperability, what we refer to as herding cats. We do not nor require seek their commitment to work with only our group, and we are actively looking for other entities and individuals that might want to collaborate with our group to develop a much broader strategy for introducing ideas and possible structure in the concept paper.

**DOE Question #6**

**Question:** Can the DOE notify other respondents to go to our website, as well as provide a place to identify other respondent's websites, as part of the outreach effort.

<http://www.xbrl-cet.com/solar-bankability-data-foa.html>

**Question:** Can the DOE notify respondents of events that may of interest, such as the DATA Act Summit on June 10<sup>th</sup>, with will cover such topics a data standards for recipients of federal funding, potentially including solar projects.

<http://www.datacoalition.org/events/summits/data-act-summit/>

**DOE Response:** No, DOE is barred from endorsing any events or organizations supporting this proposal.

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Restrictions on prior DOE funded FOA's and/or other type of previous funding.

The DOE, along with many other government funding efforts, have created assets and resources that can act as foundations for follow on activity. Some examples are BEDES, the Green Button, California Go Solar, IEP XML, XBRL US, Smart Grid Interoperability Panel, and many others. Building on those previously funded efforts should be high priority, but it might be considered a violation of various limiting terms and conditions, which would prevent those resources from exploited to their full potential.

**DOE Question #7**

**Question:** Can IEP XML be incorporated without violating any rules.

**Question:** Can BEDES scope be expanded as part of this FOA so that its efforts to “knit together” data standards, and its knowledgebase, can include data standards identified and accepted as part of the FOA.

**Question:** Can the Green Button model for developing consensus and data sets be replicated using the same resources.

**DOE Response:** Applicants are not barred from proposing building off of existing standards providing that that decision is reflective of the industry lead working group. Advocating for a specific standard without active participation in an open stakeholder process listed as an applications specifically not of interest (Section 1.C).

Cost Allocations and Funding Agreements with National Labs, FFRDCs, GOGOs, Federal Agencies and Federal Instrumentalities, including non-DOE related.

The DATA Act will compel all federal agencies, including the DOE, to comply with the legislation within twenty four months. However the DATA Act is not limited to the DOE, all federal agencies, along with all recipients of federal funding, are subject to the DATA Act and in response they will be incurring expenses and spending funds regardless of this FOA. Since there will be significant cost savings to all that will be able to exploit the newly established data interoperability for financial reporting created in part by this OFA, a portion of those funds Could be effectively utilized as part of this FOA if they were encouraged to participate.

**Question:** Can the DOE expand the beneficiaries of the data interoperability to other federal, state and local agencies to encourage cost sharing contributions as provided for in the FOA.

**DOE Response:** No response

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Expanded Beneficiates

As noted previously the DATA Act will compel wide scale adoption of data standards, which in turn will enable a wide range of innovations that will drive down costs and improve access to opportunities not only for businesses involved in solar energy, but many industries.

**DOE Question #8**

**Question:** Can the DOE expand the beneficiaries of this to include small business, service disabled veteran owned enterprises, women owned business enterprises, and similar groups regardless of their involvement in solar energy.

**DOE Response:** Please see Section I.C. Applications Specifically Not of Interest., "Applications should be solar-focused, with goals related to lowering the cost of solar energy in the U.S. "

Restriction on Lobbying Activities

There are various federal, state and local initiatives and legislation to promote and or compel data standards, and the vary act of responding to this FOA could be considered advocacy for that legislative activity. The DATA is just one example.

**DOE Question #9**

**Question:** Can the DOE exempt any activity that is related to promoting open standards and interoperability from this FOA.

**Question:** Can registered lobbyists participate in the FOA

**Question:** Can state agencies involved in legislative activity participate in the FOA

**DOE Response:** See Section III, Eligibility Information. Additionally, please review Section IV.D.10 and IV.I.6 regarding lobbying.

Ownership of Technology, Intellectual Property and Inventions

The FOA indicates that it is designed to support new financial and underwriting products, as well as appraisal, grid operations, operations and maintenance services. These new products and services will result from commercial interests collaborating on expanding interoperability as a non-commercial public resource. The underlying incentive is to expand the "public resource" with data fields and other requirements for the use of "proprietary" systems and services. The commercial application of these new products and services will be enabled by exploiting interoperability, which is byproduct of the FOA, but otherwise completely independent of the resulting taxonomy or similar public structure.

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**DOE Question #10**

**Question:** Can the DOE clarify that the FOA is limited to the establishment of data interoperability as a public resource, which is open standards based and non-commercial. The technology, intellectual property and inventions provisions are limited to just the non-commercial interoperability structure and taxonomy, and does not extend to the various commercial innovations that utilize interoperability, the taxonomy or the structures established in whole or in part by the FOA.

**DOE Response:** Per the solicitation, all resulting data standards, taxonomies, and schemas will be open.

Timeline Constraint to Identify Subsequent Activity

The FOA is designed to promote collaboration and exploration for how to establish data interoperability, but then constrains the respondents to pre-identify the final outcome without the benefit of learning from the initial collaboration process. It should be anticipated that the process of collaboration will be a catalyst for any number of innovative ideas, and the FOA should encourage flexibility in development to accommodate shifts by allowing subsequent phases to be modified without penalty or unnecessary constraint.

**DOE Question #11**

**Question:** Can the DOE allow respondents to be vague about subsequent steps, and keep the response to overall objectives and future phase's implementation subject to future findings.

**DOE Response:** Applicants should structure their applications based on the descriptions in Section IV. Applications will be reviewed based on criteria described in Section V.

Contests for subsequent phases

One effective way to promote innovation is through contests and similar outreach efforts. Examples are the SunShot Catalyst Program, the XBRL Challenge and the DOE Data By Design Contest.

**DOE Question #12**

**Question:** Can subsequent funding be for contests, where the topics and recipients are not identified in advance but subject to what is learned in the initial phases.

**DOE Response:** Any subsequent contests would be subject to appropriations and funded outside of this particular FOA.

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Membership Dues as Cost Sharing

**DOE Question #27**

Some of our team collaborators are trade associations that are supported by membership dues to cover the cost of the services they provide to constituents. Under consideration is waiving the membership dues if the non-member will commit to being an active and fully engaged collaborator for the DOE FOA. Does trade association membership fees that are waived for the DOE FOA period (or shorter) qualify as in-kind donation if the waiver is directly tied to the DOE FOA?

**DOE Response: No, these costs may not be considered cost share. Please refer to 2CFR §200.306 Cost sharing or matching. Contributions must be actually expended costs and must be verifiable from the entity's records.**