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Hidden within the $1.2 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), signed into law in November 2021, is a $1 billion allocation for the Energy Improvements in Rural or Remote Areas (ERA) program. Created by the Department of Energy’s (DOE’s) Office of Clean Energy Demonstrations (OCED), the ERA program prioritizes investments in solar energy, microgrids, battery energy storage systems, heat pumps, and hydroelectric power facilities in rural areas with populations of 10,000 or fewer.

Rural communities face unique challenges compared to their urban counterparts, such as higher energy costs, remoteness, and high transmission costs. The program aims to deliver measurable benefits to rural communities left behind in the energy transition by supporting new clean energy systems. Federal investments will help educate rural community members on clean energy, reduce energy poverty, and displace pollution from the fossil fuel industry.

When DOE opened the program in March 2023, it received hundreds of applications totaling more than $1.5 billion from nonprofits, rural electric cooperatives, state agencies, and tribal nations seeking federal funding to deploy clean energy into their communities.

On February 27, 2024, OCED announced $366 million in ERA awards to 17 community-driven projects across 20 states and 30 tribal nations to help rural communities accelerate their clean energy transition by deploying solar-power microgrids, hydropower, and batteries. Funded projects are expected to cut energy costs, create jobs, and accelerate clean energy deployment in rural and remote communities. Awardees will work with local communities to develop projects that provide more affordable and reliable clean energy for rural areas. Ultimately, these projects will reduce environmental impacts and decrease carbon emissions.

Wisconsin Office of Sustainable and Clean Energy and Office of Rural Prosperity

Bayfield County, Wisconsin

Solar PV + battery storage system microgrids

Iowa State University Electric Power Research Center and Montezuma Utilities

Bangui rural microgrids

Solar PV + battery storage system microgrid with substation improvements, advanced metering, and electric vehicle chargers

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