

North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality
State Energy Office
Weatherization Assistance Program
5 Yr. Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL)
Request for Proposal (RFP)
Weatherization Collaborative Lead Agency
Up to \$2.25M

RFP release date: 4/25/24

RFP deadline to respond: 5/06/24

ALL VENDORS:

The enclosed packet contains a "REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL" for a Weatherization Collaborative Lead Agency. **This approach is being utilized for the 5 Yr. BIL funds only. This solicitation model does not affect the annual appropriations, the annual Weatherization program design, or the annual funding allocated to the agencies supporting that program.** This approach will allow BIL funds to be expended efficiently, serving more residents, and increasing opportunities within the local communities.

The proposal consists of the following documents:

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

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I. Summary

The State Energy Office (SEO) office at the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (NC DEQ) is committed to ensuring affordable, just, and equitable access to energy. Through the Weatherization Program (WAP), NC DEQ works to assist low-to-medium income (LMI) residents in NC (income of $\leq 200\%$ federal poverty level) with energy efficiency upgrades to reduce their energy burden and improve home living conditions. To boost WAP outcomes, NCSEO is working to build a more sustainable WAP workforce, innovate the existing WAP program, and surge the number of homes served. The SEO believes that persons in need can be better and more effectively served by the State if both federal and state funds are blended for home energy efficiency and essential health and safety renovations. For program success, the SEO envisions Weatherization (Wx) Hubs in 8 different regions of NC (Wx Collaborative Facilitating Agencies) that would lead a cooperative effort between Local governments, Home Repair and Community Development organizations, Aging Related agencies, Community Social Services, Housing and Development Agencies, Councils of Governments, and other nonprofits. The collaborative Wx model will mitigate duplication of efforts between different groups and allow for a “no wrong door” approach for eligible persons to leverage available funding for home upgrades. NC DEQ aims to find and hire a Wx Collaborative Lead Agency (or agencies) that are equipped to train the regional hub agencies in implementation of the collaborative approach for home upgrades, including Wx services. Ultimately, this program design will improve communication and efficiency in the WAP, causing an increase in the number of weatherized homes and a decrease in carbon emissions from the residential sector. The Wx goals align with the North Carolina Clean Energy Plan (CEP), which aims to provide equitable energy access to all NC residents and supports Justice40 Initiatives by serving disadvantaged persons and communities.

II. Background

In many North Carolina communities, energy efficiency programs, weatherization programs, and home repair and rehabilitation programs are delivered and administered separately through multiple agencies. Lack of communication between these agencies makes it difficult for eligible homeowners to access services they require to obtain a safe, weatherized, and energy efficient home. The Wx office at NC DEQ aims to improve the current WAP design to best serve LMI NC residents by identifying program shortfalls. The Wx office acknowledges that homes eligible for weatherization services may be waitlisted if the dwelling is not in “weatherization-ready conditions.” Thus, eligible LMI homeowners and renters are deferred from weatherization services if their residence requires additional work that weatherization funding cannot be used for; these fixes include serious health concerns like mold and leaky roofs. It was the responsibility of the homeowner or renter to seek out, apply for, and coordinate repairs across various agencies. The separation of services and lack of coordination between these programs has created significant inefficiencies: funds are often left on the table because they are not properly leveraged, which costs both service provider organizations and applicants time, money, and effort. The current home repair model creates obstacles that hinder the deployment of energy efficiency upgrades, weatherization programs, and urgent health and safety repairs, which leaves LMI North Carolinians without services that they desperately need and are eligible for.

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Based on experience gained through multiple projects completed under American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding, the NC State Energy Office (SEO) recognizes the need for stronger collaboration among local, direct service providers as critical to successfully deploying additional WAP funds over the next 5 years. Robust collaboration between local weatherization, home repair service providers, and related entities is essential to streamline and efficiently complete not only weatherization home repairs but repairs necessary to have homes in weatherization-ready conditions. A local collaborative model will expand the reach and impacts of the WAP program for disadvantaged communities (DACs) in NC.

The SEO is in search of a Wx Collaborative Lead Agency that will help to employ a cooperative home repair approach throughout the state by identifying and training appropriate agencies that can take part in the collaboration and coordination with local partners. We anticipate that Wx Hub collaborations will be based on the geographic jurisdictions of NC’s weatherization service providers (**Figure 1**). The Wx Collaborative Lead Agency will train Wx Hub agencies, more specifically the Wx Collaborative Facilitating Agencies at each hub, to work with local weatherization and home repair service providers to better serve low-income homeowners—this will include the design and training of a unified intake process, collaborative case management process, and uniform program assessment strategies for services such as accessibility modifications, weatherization, home repair programs, and electrification assistance as needed.

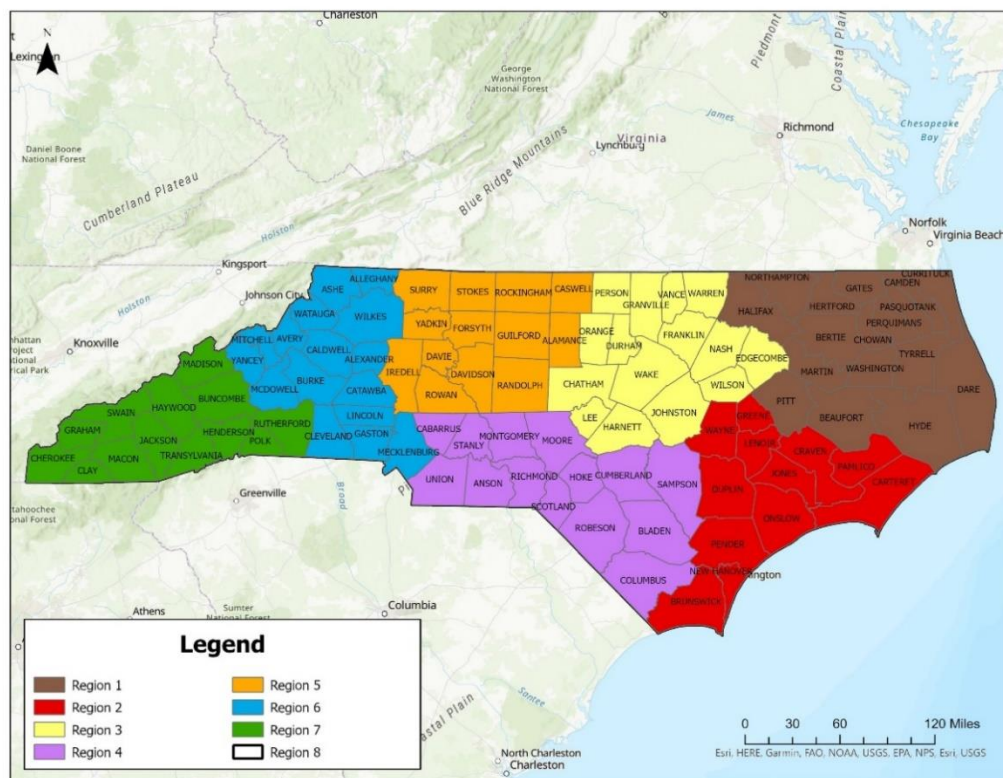


Figure 1. Map of North Carolina color coded by single family weatherization regions. Each region will house a collaborative hub that oversees weatherization and home upgrade services for eligible NC residents. Region 8 encompasses the entire state and is specifically for weatherization of multifamily homes.

III. Statement of Need

NC DEQ aims to find and hire a Wx Collaborative Lead Agency (or agencies) that are equipped to train the regional Wx Collaborative Facilitating Agencies at each Wx hub in the implementation of the collaborative approach for home upgrades. The Wx Collaborative Lead Agency will be responsible for training the Collaborative Facilitating Agencies at each of the 8 regional Wx Hubs in the following processes:

- Outreach: Engaging with local partners in each of the 7 single family Wx regions to encourage buy-in for the voluntary process. The roll out of this approach is geography-based and depends on building trust with local groups. The timeline of this process may vary significantly from community to community.
- Accessible and Coordinated Care Information: Use of a tailored database or other approach to facilitate the sharing of relevant applicant and house-repair information among the collaborative.
- Cooperative Case Management Model: Assist collaboratives in development of a tailored approach to assess potential homes to be weatherized and develop a timeline for the work of each agency involved in that home.

The Wx Hub approaches must be tailored to specific regional needs and should be rooted in the interest of community partners. The stakeholders in the collaboration will be the groups working in the homes of low-income families that include but are not limited to a) Local governments b) Home Repair and Community Development organizations c) Aging Related agencies d) Community Social Services e) Housing and Development Agencies f) Councils of Governments g) other nonprofits. The tools and strategies outlined above may need to be utilized in different ways to allow for a tailored plan and coordinated efforts by the Collaborative Facilitating Agencies at the varying Wx Hubs. The SEO expects that each weatherization agency involved, as identified by the State, will engage and participate in a locally organized, appropriately structured collaborative process as a condition of receiving WAP funds.

This collaborative approach will be phased-in across the state over five years.

The Weatherization Assistance Program expects the "Focus Area 1 - Weatherization Collaborative Lead Agency" to train, develop, and support staff at the regional training centers. The training centers will be established by the provider of "Focus Area 2 – Upgrades to Weatherization Training Program" and the State Energy Office Weatherization Assistance Program Manager.

The prospective lead service organization has flexibility to create incentives that maximize impacts for their program. Successful applicants will have more than one method (monetary and non-monetary) to incentivize community-based organizations to participate in the collaborative.

The "Focus Area 1 - Weatherization Collaborative Lead Agency" will have authority to successfully implement the program based on provisions in the "State of North Carolina, Weatherization Assistance Program, Five Year Plan Under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law". In addition, the Weatherization Assistance Program will ensure that the selected provider will have authority in the contracts for each Focus Area and associated weatherization agencies participating in the 5-year BIL program.

IV. RFP Timeline

RFP activity	Time and Date
RFP posted	4/25/24
RFP questions by bidders due	4/29/24
RFP answers posted by NC DEQ	5/2/24
RFP due	5/6/24
Awards Selected	5/17/24

V. Funding Source

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) was enacted on November 15, 2021, with the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) releasing specific guidance for WAP agencies under Weatherization Program Notice BIL 22-1 on March 30, 2022. Financial stimulus from the BIL will build on the historic strength of WAP by elevating funding for the next five years. Federal BIL funding aligns with the North Carolina CEP and will be utilized to help achieve the State’s energy reduction goals of decreasing electric power sector greenhouse gas emissions by 70% below 2005 levels by 2030 and of attaining carbon neutrality by 2050. Furthermore, in 2021, North Carolina enacted House Bill 951, which emphasizes its commitment to reduce carbon dioxide emissions in the electric power sector based on key goals presented in the CEP.

The North Carolina SEO WAP will distribute \$89,776,045 of BIL funds for the purpose of enhancing energy efficiency in the homes of low-income families, particularly those in DACs, in all 100 counties of North Carolina. The WAP energy upgrades provide homeowners relief through energy savings and home improvements that support equitable health and safety for North Carolinians. The NC SEO anticipates that the ~\$89.7M BIL stimulus will aid approximately 6,000 households across the state.

Up to \$15.68 million has been retained for Training and Technical Assistance over the five-year grant contract period. These funds will be directed towards a workforce development program that will include an apprentice component and significant capacity building for our existing network of subgrantees to successfully expand their capabilities. Specifically, up to \$2.25M is available to support WAP upgrades to a new, collaborative model.

It is important to note that NCSEO WAP 5 Yr. BIL funds will follow the U.S. DOE the March 2022 [Administrative and Legal Requirement Document](#) (ALRD) PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE guidance. The \$2.25M will not be released as a one lump sum. Releasing the funds are based on evaluation of project performance, project schedule adherence, the extent milestone objectives are met, compliance with reporting requirements and overall contribution to the program goals and objectives.

As a result of this evaluation, DOE/SEO WAP may, at its discretion, authorize the following actions: (1) continue to fund the project, contingent upon the availability of funds appropriated by Congress for the purpose of this program and the availability of future-year budget authority; (2) place a hold on federal funding for the project, pending further supporting data or funding; or

(3) discontinue funding the project because of insufficient progress, change in strategic direction, or lack of funding.

VI. Contractor Qualifications

Minimal Bidder(s) qualifications required for implementation of contract activities include:

1. The Bidder(s) shall have detailed knowledge of, and experience in, issues related to weatherization or low-income programs in North Carolina.
2. The Bidder(s) shall be familiar with both DOE's and North Carolina's Weatherization Assistance Program.
3. The Bidder(s) should be familiar with methods for blending Federal, State, local funding opportunities in weatherization.
4. The Bidder(s) should be familiar with finding unique funding sources to increase the eligible clients base for weatherization in North Carolina.
5. The Bidder(s) should be familiar with methods to increase the Weatherization Assistance Program client base in underserved areas in North Carolina.

VII. Proposal Guidelines and Requirements

To make certain proposed projects meet the criteria above, eligible applicants will be expected to provide, at minimum, the following information concerning the proposed collaborative training:

- Agency name(s), address(es), and technical lead(s)
- A description of the agency's experience and preparedness to implement training.
- A description of the proposed training and materials for the facilitating collaborative agencies, including the training locations and formats (i.e., in person, virtual, hybrid, etc.). Training should include methodology for collaborative outreach, management of accessible and coordinated care information, and design of cooperative case management models.
- The prospective lead service organization should demonstrate a robust statewide approach to work in each of the seven single family weatherization regions. The development of diverse partnerships beyond the "*Focus Area 1 Collaborative Lead Agency*" service territory is needed for a strong application. This is critical to encourage equitable programmatic impacts and stewardship of funds. Include a proposed timeline for training and engagement of local agencies at the 7 single family regional Wx Hubs.
- A plan describing how the lead agency will field and answer questions from the collaborative facilitator agencies during training and in real-time as the collaborative model is initiated.
- A community benefits analysis, describing how the proposed methodology and training will improve weatherization services for LMI households and DACs.
- A description of how the Lead Wx Collaborative Agency will ensure that Collaborative Facilitating Agencies will enhance and increase the rate of weatherization services through the cooperative model.

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- A list of metrics that should be collected by facilitating collaborative agencies that will indicate success of the collaborative weatherization model.
- Regular reporting on objectives metrics, project progress, and any project setbacks (with root cause analysis) encountered.
- Identify at least two or more Go/No-Go milestones in the project. A Go/No-Go milestone is a major milestone in the project that if not completed on time may result in a cancellation of the subaward. Progress towards meeting the Go/No-Go milestones must be reported in the quarterly progress reports submitted to NC DEQ and U.S. DOE. At these Go/No-Go milestones, NC DEQ will evaluate project performance, schedule adherence, and contribution to the WAP goals and objectives.
- A detailed budget and estimated timeline for training.
- Resumes of those who will lead training and development of the Collaborative Wx program.
- Three letters of support advocating for the applying agency's capability in the proposed project.

VIII. Tools and Training

The Wx Collaborative Lead Agency should be prepared to train participating agencies in the following:

- a. Deferral Tracking: U.S. DOE encourages the tracking of deferrals using consistent terminology for recording the reasons and what repairs would be necessary in order to proceed with weatherization. When repairs are necessary in order to install energy efficiency measures, but those repairs are beyond the allowable limits of incidental repairs and/or health and safety cost categories, deferral is often required. If other funding sources were available to address the repairs, it would increase the number of low-income homes WAP could effectively weatherize. DOE WAP has developed a tracking tool to provide consistent terminology and a brief video training describing how the tool is organized. DOE WAP will continue to work with our providers to address additional barriers and facilitate effective braiding of funds. DOE is developing training resources, including in the Learning Management System (LMS) to assist Grantees in braiding funds to address structural issues and enable deeper retrofits. Newly released SERC and E&I grant opportunities also allow for deeper retrofits being braided with typical weatherization work.
- b. Justice40 Initiatives: Justice40 is a whole-of-government effort to ensure that Federal agencies work with states and local communities to deliver at least 40 percent of the overall benefits from Federal investments in climate and clean energy to DACs. For additional information, see Weatherization Program Notice BIL 22-1 11 Executive Order 14008, Federal Register: Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home, and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Memorandum 21-28.

The Collaborative Training should include the importance of providing 40% of weatherization benefits to DACs in NC. NCDEQ has created a map of the top-priority, overlapping places to weatherize (TOP-W) in NC. The training agency should plan to teach

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Wx agencies how to utilize the TOP-W map and prioritize weatherization in the geographic areas defined within their region.

IX. Declaration of Confidential Information

If a proposer deems that certain information required by this RFP is confidential, the proposer must label such information as CONFIDENTIAL prior to submission. The proposer must reference where the information labeled CONFIDENTIAL is located in the proposal. For each subsection so referenced, the proposer must provide a convincing explanation and rationale sufficient to justify an exemption of the information from release under the FOIA. The explanation and rationale must be stated in terms of (a) the prospective harm to the competitive position of the proposer that would result if the identified information were to be released and (b) the reasons why the information is legally exempt.

X. Questions about the RFP

Eligible Bidders shall carefully review this RFP. Questions must be directed to Matthew Davis via the [question portal](#) on or before Noon Eastern Standard Time, 4/29/24

NC DEQ will not respond to verbal questions. All questions received by Noon Eastern Standard Time, 4/29/24 will be answered in writing; NC DEQs written response will be posted to the DEQ [WAP webpage](#) by 5:00 p.m. 5/2/24

XI. Submission Details

RFPs should be formatted to have 1-inch margins with 12 pt font. The agency name(s) and page number should appear on each page. SEO recommends that proposals do not exceed 15 pages. Any example training material may be provided as appendices.

All proposals shall be received by 10 a.m. Eastern Standard Time, 5/6/24 Proposals may be submitted through [the application portal](#).

Proposals shall be submitted in PDF format.

The Weatherization Assistance Program recognizes the importance of coordinating various programs that support low-income households across North Carolina. If desired, a prospective lead organization may apply for two or more RFPs as part of a holistic initiative. If pursuing this option, applications should clearly define which RFPs are being pursued, meet minimum contractor qualifications in each affected RFP, follow all proposal guidelines/requirements in each affected RFP, fully answer all questions presented in each affected RFP, and clearly state how combining the affected RFPs as one holistic initiative will be beneficial for programmatic effectiveness. If awarded, the funding allocation will equal the collective total of each RFP pursued under the holistic package The funds will not be released as one lump sum and is based on meeting programmatic statewide objectives for the Weatherization Assistance Program. If an element of the combined RFP package (i.e., applying for several RFPs as one holistic initiative) is deemed insufficient or missing, the full package may be denied.

XII. Evaluation of Proposals

NC DEQ’s SEO will evaluate submitted proposals using the criteria listed in the table below. Numerical scores will be provided to each proposal. Applicants will be notified of the committee’s decisions on 6/8/24 Eastern Standard Time. NC DEQ will choose a favored contractor to begin contract negotiations, and may, failing to reach satisfactory terms, choose another bidder. Further, NC DEQ reserves the right to choose any contractor – regardless of score.

Evaluation Criteria	Points
Vendor Experience	10
Proposed Training Materials and Methods	20
Weatherization Agency Engagement Plan	30
Community Benefits Analysis	15
Metrics for Reporting	15
Budget	10
Total Score	100

XIII. Announcement of Award Recipients

Applicants will be notified of their proposal funding status by e-mail on 6/8/24 5:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time.

XIV. Reporting Requirements for Accepted Projects

Contingent on use of BIL funding, any selected entities will be mandated to follow U.S. DOE’s and NC WAP’s program and reporting requirements. This will include, but may not be limited to:

- The reporting and audit requirements of 2 CFR Part 200, including submission of an annual audit of weatherization funds.
- Travel regulations that include travel authorization, reimbursement, advancements, and per diem rates that do not exceed the State of North Carolina’s maximum amount.
- Funding regulations. The T&TA funds received for this project cannot be used to purchase equipment used in the day-to-day installation of weatherization measures.
- The Build America, Buy America provisions of the BIL (BABA). Per Weatherization Assistance Program Memorandum 104, “Only weatherization on public housing or privately owned buildings that serve a public function are required to comply with the BABA requirements”.
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulations as set forth in 40 CFR Part 247 - Guidelines for Procurement of Recovered Materials, which encourages the use of recyclable materials. Subgrantees shall use recyclable materials whenever possible. Compliance with EPA regulations also applies to the decommissioning of replaced baseload appliances whether subcontracted out or not.

The Subgrantee shall submit certified and timely reports to DEQ detailing the progress made towards the program objective(s) and all administrative and program expenditures. The report

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must agree with the Subgrantee’s accounting records, client database, and be certified by the Subgrantee’s chief executive officer or their designee via handwritten or certified electronic signature.

- a) At a minimum, the required reporting documents for a complete monthly billing package follows the reporting requirements in 5 Yr. BIL WAP Section 2.16.
- b) Reporting Format – DEQ will provide all Subgrantees with online access to software for the purpose of reporting weatherization-related activities. Subgrantees are required to use designated program software for reporting purposes.
- c) NC WAP cannot approve an incomplete billing package. Expenses will not be reimbursed without providing items listed above in 14(a) and (b) on a monthly basis (*regardless of whether expenses were made*).

XV. Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation Process and Scoring – Focus Area 1

Each application will be assessed to the degree in which applications meet the following evaluation criteria:

1. Vendor Experience
2. Proposed Training Materials and Methods
3. Weatherization Agency Engagement Plan
4. Community Benefits Analysis
5. Metrics for Reporting
6. Budget

To achieve maximum points, applicants are encouraged to delineate clearly and completely the following:

- Implementation Measures
- Population Impacted
- Community Engagement and Other Outreach Activities
- Leveraging Partners

Evaluation Criterion 1: Vendor Experience: Applicant’s experience and preparedness to train agencies in implementing a collaborative approach for home upgrades, including weatherization services across the state of North Carolina (10 possible points)

The score received for Criterion 1 will depend upon how well the application details the

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following elements: (1) the organization’s experience, (2) knowledge of rules and regulations of weatherization services, and (3) the degree to which applicants’ program(s) have been successful in producing desired results in collaborative weatherization services.

Evaluation Criterion 2: Proposed Training Materials and Methods

Describe the proposed training and materials and timelines for the facilitating collaborative agencies, including the training locations and formats (i.e., in person, virtual, hybrid, etc.). (20 possible points)

The score received for Criterion 2 will depend upon how well the application details how the project: (1) describes the proposed training and materials for the facilitating collaborative agencies, including the training locations and formats (i.e., in person, virtual, hybrid, etc.). Training should include methodology for collaborative outreach, management of accessible and coordinated care information, and design of cooperative case management models. (2) Outlines a proposed timeline for training and engagement of local agencies at the 7 single family regional Wx Hubs. (3) Describes how the lead agency will field and answer questions from the collaborative facilitator agencies during training and in real-time as the collaborative model is initiated.

- If the application does not include a reference or incorporate any the Key Weatherization Focus Areas, then the highest point allotment available is Partially. Application(s) that clearly state the approach to collaborate with Focus Areas 1, 2 or 3 can the proposed project is benefiting a DAC can score Mostly or Higher

Evaluation Criterion 3: Weatherization Agency Engagement Plan How the agency leverages partners in implementing energy efficient and clean energy upgrades that assist in a more resilient energy grid (30 possible points)

Leveraging Partners allows applicants to access complementary strengths from neighboring communities, states, the federal government, and non-profit and private partners. This potentially helps the applicant from a cost basis and serves the local community’s greater good.

The score received for Criterion 3 will depend upon how well the application incorporates: (1) partnerships (*e.g., state, territory, Tribal, private, district, local community*) that will ensure the project meets community needs, (2) an explanation of how these partnerships benefit DACs, (3) timeline(s) for implementation; and (4) an explanation on the anticipated outcome of those partnerships (*e.g., leveraging resources such as financial, material, and educational resources, coordinating multi-jurisdictional projects, heightened focus on equity related issues*).

A disadvantaged community may be characterized by variables including, but not limited to: low income, high and/or persistent poverty, high unemployment and underemployment, high housing cost burden and substandard housing, distressed neighborhoods, disproportionate environmental burden and high cumulative impacts, disproportionate climate impacts, high energy cost burden and low energy access, and all geographic areas within Tribal jurisdictions.

If a population impacted as demonstrated by the application does not include a DAC, then the highest point allotment available is Partially. Application(s) that clearly state the proposed project is benefiting a DAC can score Mostly or Higher.

Additional considerations for completing the application.

- What partners were involved in the project design? How did partners contribute to the application? What partners will contribute to the implementation of the project? Partnerships can take many different forms. For example, partners may contribute financially, support and promote the proposed project, help generate community-wide awareness of the risks the proposal is designed to address, etc.
- To what extent were non-governmental organizations, including those organizations that represent disadvantaged groups, universities, or other government entities consulted for advice or assistance? How has collaboration with surrounding jurisdictions supported project development?
- To what extent have other programs or funding sources been leveraged for the project?
- What community groups will participate in this project? What potential exists for partnerships to continue beyond implementation of the project?

Tip: NC WAP recommends clearly describing disadvantaged communities within the narrative and uploading documentation relevant to disadvantaged communities outlined in the application.

Evaluation Criterion 4: Community Benefits Analysis (15 possible points)

The score received for Criterion 4 will depend upon how well the application describes: (1) how the proposed methodology and training will improve weatherization services for LMI households and DACs.

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(2) how the Lead Wx Collaborative Agency will ensure that Collaborative Facilitating Agencies will enhance and increase the rate of weatherization services through the cooperative model.

- If the application does not include a reference or incorporate any the Key Weatherization Focus Areas, then the highest point allotment available is Partially. Application(s) that clearly state the approach to collaborate with focus areas 1, 2 or 3 can the proposed project is benefiting a DAC can score Mostly or Higher.

Evaluation Criterion 5: Metrics for Reporting, (15 possible points)

The score received for Criterion 5 will depend upon how well the application describes: (1) what and how information is collected on people in the household based on the “*State of North Carolina Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Weatherization Assistance Plan*” that is housed on the NC WAP webpage: <https://www.deq.nc.gov/energy-climate/state-energy-office/weatherization-assistance-program>, and (2) the policies and procedures of keeping private and personal information safe.

Evaluation Criterion 6: Budget (10 possible points)

The score received for Criterion 6 will depend upon how well the application: (1) provides a detailed budget and estimated timeline for training.