

Funding Opportunity Announcement

Net Zero Energy Schools

FY2026 Decarbonizing Schools Program

*****This FOA is for Area of Interest 4: Net Zero Energy Schools*****

Area of Interest (AOI) Description

This is the funding opportunity announcement for AOI 4: Net Zero Energy Schools (“AOI 4”, “this AOI”) as part of the FY25 Decarbonizing Schools Program. This is a competitive program that provides Maryland’s Local Education Agencies (LEAs) with the opportunity to request funding to support the design, construction and post-occupancy commissioning of the next generation of Net Zero Energy (NZE) Schools in Maryland. MEA defines a Net Zero Energy School as a school that generates sufficient renewable energy to cover their annual energy needs, thereby minimizing nonrenewable energy usage.

Funding under this AOI helps LEAs plan design strategies, as well as implement energy efficiency and renewable energy technologies, that will vary from school to school and will not be selected until the school design process is underway. In addition, funding will assist with post-occupancy commissioning and studies. Funding under this AOI is expected to be provided for multiple fiscal years to coincide with planning and construction phases.

Type of Grant Program: Competitive - Statewide

Application Deadline: 3:00 P.M. EST on Friday, November 21, 2025.

Anticipated Funding

A total of \$8,500,000 is anticipated to be available from the Strategic Energy Investment Fund (“SEIF”). The amount awarded may be more or less, depending on the quantity and quality of applications received. On average, MEA expects to provide \$1 to \$3 million per application.

Eligible Applicants

State of Maryland Local Education Agencies.

Application URL: <https://form.jotform.com/251605585653159>

Period of Performance

Expected period of performance: Seventy-two to seventy-five (72-75) months beginning with the effective date of the executed grant agreement. An extension for good cause may be requested by a grantee and must be justified with written documentation explaining the need for an extension. Extensions are allowed at the sole discretion of MEA.

Eligible Activities

Applicants are eligible to submit one or more applications. Funding is available for the incremental costs of the design, construction, and post-occupancy commissioning for net zero energy schools.

Funding under this AOI will help LEAs plan design strategies, as well as implement energy efficiency and renewable energy technologies, that will vary from school to school and will not be selected until the school design process is underway. In addition, funding will assist with post-occupancy commissioning and studies. The cost and performance metrics associated with this AOI will look at the schools on a building by building basis.

Ineligible Activities

- Activities that include fossil-fuel or other combustion technologies that produce greenhouse gas emissions are typically not eligible for funding. Limited exceptions may be considered where there is no other technically feasible technology or where a source can be demonstrated to be zero emission. You must contact the MEA Program Manager in writing if seeking funding for fossil-fuel technologies.

AOI 4 Deliverables

The cost and performance metrics associated with this AOI will look at the schools on a building by building basis.

For this reason, MEA will be tracking this AOI using the following metrics:

- Construction costs (\$/gross square footage (GSF)) (net zero school costs versus the construction costs for a standard school that is built to the minimum current commercial energy codes)
- Modeled energy intensity (BTU/GSF) (design phase)
 - kWh/GSF(modeled)
 - MMCF/GSF (modeled)
- Modeled renewable energy requirements to achieve net zero
 - Renewable energy intensity (Watts of renewables/GSF)
 - Total renewable energy requirements (W)
- Actual energy intensity (BTU/GSF) of the net zero school once the building has been in operation
 - kWh/GSF(actual)
 - MMCF/GSF (actual)
- Employment hours associated with each phase of each application and the associated costs

AOI 4 Timeline

To design a NZE school, the necessary energy efficient design elements need to be incorporated very early in the process, to include such early but important design decisions such as site orientation and to keep costs minimized. For this reason, NZE school projects need to be selected at the very beginning of the new school design/construction process.

MEA understands that the FY26 funding cycle does not align with the CIP schedule so applicants may come to the table before their project planning begins, or if they're already in the middle of their design cycle. The following sample construction schedule is for applicants already in the process of design fund acquisition:

- **FY 2027 CIP Planning request received by IAC:** October 2026
- **FY 2027 CIP Planning request approved by IAC:** Spring 2027
- **Design work starts (due to availability of county funding):** Spring 2027
- **Design work completed:** Spring/Summer 2027
- **FY 2028 CIP Funding request received by IAC:** October 2027
- **FY 2028 CIP Funding request approved by IAC:** Spring 2028
- **Project put out to bid:** Fall 2026 / Winter 2028
- **20 - 24 month construction window:** July 2028 - July 2030
- **Earliest likely school opening:** July 2030

This timeframe is for elementary and middle schools only; some middle and high schools will require a lengthier design and construction timeframe.

Under the proposed budget of \$8,500,000, the allocation of funds is structured in a three tiered process to ensure the efficient use of resources, provide clear milestones for grantees, and to provide a fair exit strategy for each grantee after the successful completion of each tier. Funds from each grant will be provided to support the incremental costs related to the administrative and technical costs related to project planning, design costs, construction, and post occupancy commissioning of a NZE school.

AOI 4 Minimum Application Requirements

- Applications are submitted by the LEA
 - Third-parties may not submit an application on behalf of the LEA
- A signature applied to the application by an LEA officer with the authority to commit the applicant to execute the grant's requirements (e.g., Chair of the Board of Education, Chief Financial Officer, General Manager, etc.). This individual should have sufficient authority to identify, authorize, and provide the necessary resources to perform the activities and access the necessary resources to implement the grant agreement.
- Consistent with the intent to develop capacity for ongoing efforts, applicants should identify an LEA staff person who will be responsible for overseeing the continuation of the activities outlined in this grant announcement after the end of the award's period of performance.
- Budget: Clear budget detailing the use of requested funds, specifically for design, construction, and post-occupancy commissioning.

- Site Locations: Detailed description of the proposed Net Zero Energy school locations including justification of site selection based on community needs and benefits.
- Leveraged Funds: Identification and quantification of additional funding sources that are being leveraged alongside the MEA funds.
- Energy Impact: Modeled energy intensity (BTU/GSF) during the design phase and projected reductions.
- Scope of Work: A scope of work or executive summary detailing applicant goals and potential locations for a NZE school
- Prospective Schedule: A prospective schedule and plan for the school's design and construction. Including detailed notes from applicant or assigned design team on how they intend to meet NZE designs including renewable energy production, building controls, building envelope and commissioning needs. This includes:
 - Modeled construction costs for NZE school
 - Modeled energy intensity and renewable energy requirements to achieve NZE
 - Include current energy usage at the existing school to be replaced to demonstrate potential energy savings for applicant
 - Capital stacking plans to incorporate state, federal and local funding

AOI 4 Competitive Application Criteria

Award selection will prioritize those applications that can show the greatest energy reduction and greenhouse gas savings per MEA dollar requested. All evaluation criteria will be considered concurrently, with MEA Dollars requested per Metric Ton of carbon dioxide equivalents avoided over the lifetime of the technology having the most weight.

Applications will be considered based on all of the evaluation criteria outlined on page 5-7.

Funding

A total of \$8,500,000 is anticipated to be available for AOI 4.

The amount awarded may vary depending on the quantity and quality of applications received. Applicants who are new to the NZE school planning process, or who may need more time to plan a long-term portfolio of NZE schools, are encouraged to apply for [AOI1 funding in FY26](#) and AOI4 funding in subsequent years.

Funding is encouraged to be combined with other incentives, including the Inflation Reduction Act's Direct Pay/Elective Pay incentives for ground-source heat pumps. Total incentive reimbursables combined with grant funding may not exceed the proposed budget.

Review Process

The review of applications will follow a structured, multi-stage process:

1. The program manager will first review each application for eligibility, ensuring it meets the minimum criteria outlined in the FOA
2. Each member of the evaluation team will independently score the application based on the specified competitive criteria

3. The evaluation team will then compile individual scores, finalize overall scores, rank all applications accordingly, and make final recommendations for funding

Applications will be reviewed by a team that may include individuals from MEA, IAC, and other entities with experience in energy, construction, and capital development. The review process will be guided by the evaluation criteria and priority factors outlined in this FOA. The final grant amount for each application will be made after review of all proposals received and is subject to funding availability for the Program and any relevant statutory requirement applicable at that time.

Evaluation and Ranking Methodology

All applications will be evaluated individually based on the following criteria. The primary element for evaluation is the value of estimated metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalents avoided over the lifetime of the technology per MEA dollars (MTCO₂e/\$).

To score fairly and consistently across all applications, values for the Energy Reduction and GHG savings/MEA Dollars score will be normalized on a 0-1 scale, where higher GHG reductions per dollar receive higher scores.

The highest scoring proposals will be awarded, subject to the program's funding availability. The highest final score possible is 16.

Criteria Category	Requirement Type	Requirement/Criteria Description	Points	Weight %
Administrative	Minimum	Application submitted by the LEA and signed by an LEA officer with sufficient authority.	N/A	
Administrative	Minimum	LEA staff person identified for ongoing oversight of the project.	N/A	
Budget	Minimum	Application includes a clear budget detailing the use of requested funds, specifically for design, construction, and post-occupancy commissioning.	N/A	
Site Locations	Minimum	Detailed description of the proposed Net Zero Energy school locations including justification of site selection based on community needs and benefits.	N/A	
Leveraged Funds	Minimum	Identification and quantification of additional	N/A	

		funding sources that are being leveraged alongside the MEA funds.		
Energy Impact	Minimum	Includes modeled energy intensity (BTU/GSF) during the design phase and projected reductions.	N/A	
Scope of Work	Minimum	Includes a scope of work or executive summary detailing applicant goals and potential locations for a NZE school	N/A	
Prospective Schedule	Minimum	Includes a prospective schedule and plan for the school's design and construction	N/A	
Energy Reduction and GHG savings/MEA Dollars	Competitive	Each application will be evaluated based on the estimated metric ton of carbon dioxide equivalent avoided per MEA dollar requested	MTCO ₂ e/\$MEA	60%
Justification of Funds	Competitive	Detailed justification of how the funds will be utilized to meet or exceed NZE standards in the Scope of Work.	1-3	10%
Additional Capacity	Competitive	Demonstrate the need for additional capacity to implement and execute the design, construction, and post occupancy commissioning of a NZE school	1-3	10%
Community Impact	Competitive	Assessment of application's impact on overburdened communities, with a focus on Title I schools and high social vulnerability indices.	1-3	10%
Community Engagement	Competitive	Outline of the engagement of students, educators, and the community in all phases of the NZE school design, construction, post-occupancy	1-3	5%

		commissioning, and daily operations, with strategies for inclusive decision-making, community workshops, student initiatives, educational integration, and regular progress updates		
Educational Integration	Competitive	Assessment of plans for engaging students and the community in all phases of the project, including educational integration of sustainability concepts.	1-3	5%

Partial Awards

In general, partial awards are anticipated under this program. Awards will be distributed until funds are exhausted. In the case where the remaining funds are insufficient to fully fund an additional qualified application, a partial award will be offered to the applicant based on budget availability.

Equitable Funding Acknowledgement and Approach

MEA recognizes that LEAs across Maryland are diverse in their needs, priorities, and financial constraints. Understanding this variability, it is a fundamental objective of the FY26 Decarbonizing Public Schools Program to provide equitable funding opportunities to all LEAs within the state, regardless of their circumstances.

To this end, MEA is committed to ensuring that the allocation of funds under the Decarbonizing Public Schools Program helps address equitable access to clean energy and more sustainable schools.

To effectively support communities in Maryland that are disproportionately affected by environmental harms, MEA prioritizes equity. This is particularly relevant in the context of delivering benefits from numerous environmental programs. In Maryland, an 'Overburdened Community' is defined as any census tract where at least three environmental health indicators are above the 75th percentile statewide, in accordance with the criteria established by Maryland's Climate Solutions Now Act of 2022 (Ch. 38 of the 2022 Laws of Maryland). MEA aims to use such designations to help guide policy and allocation decisions to promote health and sustainability.

Electronic Payments

Participation in MEA grant programs is voluntary. If selected for award and to ensure the secure transmission of grant funds, grantee recipients of MEA funding are generally required to receive electronic payments from the State of Maryland. Electronic payments are set up through the State of Maryland's Comptroller's Office. Grantees must fill out and submit the "ACH/Direct Deposit Authorization for Vendor Payments Form X-10" to the Comptroller's Office via the submission

methods outlined on the X-10 form. ACH/Direct Deposit Authorization for Vendor Payment Form X-10 should not be sent to MEA.

Failure to submit ACH/Direct Deposit Authorization Form X-10 may result in award reimbursement being delayed. If an applicant is unable to receive ACH/Direct Deposit payments, MEA may provide an exception to this requirement on a case-by-case basis, at the sole discretion of MEA.

Grant Program General Provisions

MEA grant programs are covered by general provisions that apply to all of its grant programs, the most current version of these General Provisions is [General Provisions v3 2.11.22](#). The latest approved version of this document will be incorporated into all FY2026 grant agreements issued by MEA.

Submission Instructions

All documents must be submitted no later than 3:00 P.M. EST on Friday, November 21, 2025.

Once complete, application packages should be submitted to MEA via the online electronic application at <https://form.jotform.com/251605585653159> or the PDF version via email to Schools.MEA@Maryland.gov.

Applications submitted to the direct email inbox(es) of MEA employees will not be considered. MEA will not accept any application packages after this deadline under any circumstances, and all documents received by the deadline will constitute the entire submission. If electronic submission is not possible, an applicant should contact MEA via email at Schools.MEA@Maryland.gov or by calling Program Manager Kristen Keim at 443-571-6976 no fewer than fourteen (14) days prior to the deadline to arrange an alternative method of submission.

Contact Information

For more information or assistance, please visit the FY26 [MEA Decarbonizing Public Schools Program webpage](#) or contact:

Kristen Keim
Program Manager, Schools Decarbonization Program
schools.mea@maryland.gov

Attachment A: Example Calculations

AOI 4: Net Zero Energy Schools

Below are two hypothetical applications (A and B) with raw values for the given criteria.

Step 1: Apply Values

Table A: Example Applications

Application	Energy Reduction and GHG savings/ MEA Dollars (MTCO ₂ e/\$ MEA)	Justification of Funds (1-3)	Additional Capacity (1-3)	Community Impact (1-3)	Community Engagement (1-3)	Educational Integration (1-3)
A	1,500 MTCO ₂ e/\$1,000,000 = 0.0015	3	1	1	1	2
B	3,000 MTCO ₂ e/\$3,000,000 = 0.001	2	2	3	3	3

Step 2: Normalize the Calculated Values

- Cost Effectiveness: Min = 0.001, Max = 0.0015
 - **Normalized Value = (Value - Min) / (Max - Min)**

Table B: Normalization

Application	Normalized Energy Reduction and GHG savings/ MEA Dollars Score
A	$(0.0015 - 0.001) / (0.0015 - 0.001) = 1$
B	$(0.001 - 0.001) / (0.0015 - 0.001) = 0$

Step 3: Apply Weights

Table C: Weighting Factors

Application	MEA Dollars/Energy Reduction and GHG savings 60%	Justification of Funds 10%	Additional Capacity 10%	Community Impact 10%	Community Engagement 5%	Educational Integration 5%
A	$1 * 60\% = 0.6$	$3 * 10\% = 0.3$	$1 * 10\% = 0.1$	$1 * 10\% = 0.1$	$1 * 5\% = 0.05$	$2 * 5\% = 0.1$
B	$0 * 60\% = 0$	$2 * 10\% = 0.2$	$2 * 10\% = 0.2$	$3 * 10\% = 0.3$	$3 * 5\% = 0.15$	$3 * 5\% = 0.15$

Step 4: Sum the Weighted Scores

Table D: Summary of weighted scores

Application	Total Weighted Score
A	$0.6 + 0.3 + 0.1 + 0.1 + 0.05 + 0.1 = 1.25$
B	$0 + 0.2 + 0.2 + 0.3 + 0.15 + 0.15 = 1$

Results: In the above example, Application A would be more competitive than Application B. Application A would receive funding first based on its higher final score.