



Innovation Pilot Program- Round 1 Recommendations

Board of Directors - July 15, 2026





Round 1 Funding



Innovation Pilot Program

- Award an **average of \$200,000** per subaward (max \$350,000) to:
 - Demonstrate scalable solutions to key market barriers via regional pilot projects.
 - Inform decarbonization decision-making with public data, analyses, and case studies.
- Target small businesses, novel approaches and community-driven innovations.
- Expected 5-8 awards and \$1.4m distributed in Round 1.
- VEIC serves as program implementor.

Funding tracks

Track 1: Making electrification easier to deliver.

- How might we reduce the time, cost, and complexity for a tenant, business, or homeowner?

Track 2: Demand flexibility and technical performance.

- How might we support affordable and easy-to-deliver electrification projects in service of customer, contractor, and system benefits?

Track 3: Coordinated deployment and planning strategies.

- How might we identify the places, properties, or portfolios where electrification can move faster, cost less, or reach more people at once?

Track 4: Expanding access, health, and trusted delivery.

- How might we increase access to clean, healthy, and efficient buildings for all households, especially those facing financial or structural barriers?



Round 1- Review process



April 27 – May 15

- NOFO released and distributed to Power Ahead Colorado newsletter.
- Funding opportunity opened on the Power Ahead Colorado website.
- Informational webinars in English and Spanish language.



May 15 – June 30

- VEIC review, preliminary scoring and debrief with Power Ahead Colorado
- Finalist interviews with consultant Power Ahead Colorado and partners, scores updated and final scoring completed.



Fall

- Round 1 Project Launch.
- 12 – 16-month duration per project.



2027 and onward

- Continuous improvement and Rounds 2 and 3.



Scoring criteria

Category	Subcriteria	What We're Looking For
Innovation (45 points)	Problem Framing and Project Scope (10 pts)	a) Clearly describes the problem and who is affected b) Aligns with program priorities
	Innovative Approach and Insights (20 pts)	a) Introduces new or improved approaches, tools, or delivery models b) Likely to generate practical insights for the region
	Replicability and Scalability (15 pts)	a) Could transfer to other communities or markets within the DRCOG region b) Explains how scalability will be tested
Feasibility, Budget and Qualifications (45 points)	Project Design and Timeline (10 pts)	a) Activities and deliverables are well defined and connected to objectives b) Realistic timeline, ready to launch
	Thoughtful Goals and Analytic Plan (10 pts)	a) Goals match the problem framing b) Data collection and analysis methods would demonstrate pilot success
	Costs (10 pts)	a) Adequate budget detail b) Costs reasonable relative to goals c) PACO funding need clearly justified
	Qualifications (15 pts)	a) Relevant technical skills and capacity b) Relationships with targeted communities c) Solid references
Equitable Market Transformation (10 points)	Benefits and Engagement (10 pts)	a) Potential to benefit populations historically underserved by clean energy programs b) Thoughtful and meaningful community engagement

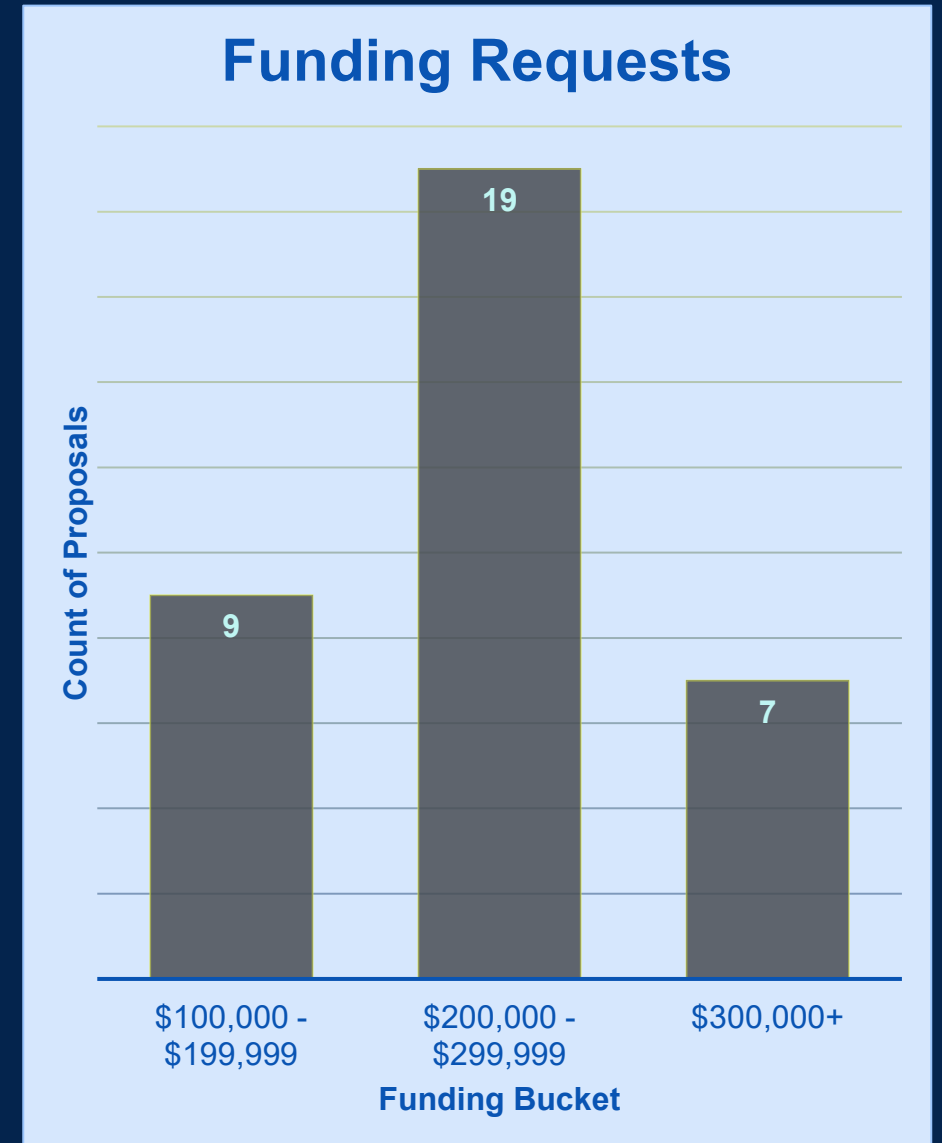
Round 1 overview

Submission results:

- 32 submitted proposals and 18 finalist interviews.
- \$245,000 average funding request.
- \$6,850,000+ total funding requested for round one.

Review process:

- VEIC scored applications using the approved matrix; DRCOG staff provided local context input.
- 18 applications were interviewed the week of June 22, with non-scoring participation from staff and local experts.
- VEIC and Power Ahead Colorado staff developed funding recommendations based on final scoring.



Round 1 Recommendation:

Project details



Program round one

Funding recommendations

Proposal Name	Lead Organization	Final Score	Funding Request
Colorado Heat Pump Fleet Intelligence Pilot	Elephant Energy, Inc.	98	\$200,000
Flexible Voltage Heat Pump Water Heater (FLEX HPWH)	New Buildings Institute	92	\$199,850
Real-World Beneficial Electrification Strategies and Operating Cost Insights for Colorado Affordable Housing	Group14 Engineering, PBC	90	\$114,975
Alternative Electrification Delivery Infrastructure Pilot	Elephant Energy, Inc.	88.5	\$200,000
Heat Pump Rooftop Unit Market Accelerator	Slipstream	86	\$229,000
Denver Public Schools - Strategic, District-Wide Mechanical Systems Framework	CMTA, Inc.	86	\$190,000
Project Lightspeed	Zero Homes	85.5	\$350,000

Elephant Energy

Colorado Heat Pump Fleet Intelligence Pilot

Description

Elephant Energy will retrofit Thalo Sidekick monitors onto 50 existing Mitsubishi cold-climate heat pump systems on Colorado's Front Range. The project will identify gaps between predicted and actual performance and build the evidence base system performance and commissioning best practices for a critical technology. The approach is scalable and OEM agnostic.

Summary Information

Budget: \$200,000

Building Type: Single family

Technology: HVAC, controls/load management

Recommendation Rationale

This proposal targets a clear gap in cold climate heat pump data by determining whether systems are performing as expected. Findings will provide better knowledge and information to improve installation practices across the region. Leveraging previously installed equipment reduces complexity and costs, which will keep implementation laser focused on results and outputs. The data that produced from this project may prove useful for further research directions for the Innovation Pilot Program to explore.

New Buildings Institute

Flexible Voltage Heat Pump Water Heater (FLEX HPWH)

Description

This project will field test flexible-voltage heat pump water heaters (HPWHs) in Colorado to enable fast and lower-cost replacement of failed gas units. This technology, which represents the best in the market can be installed at 120V and later connected to 240V power, allowing immediate installation on a standard outlet without electrical upgrades.

The primary results will be validating customer and contractor experience with the technology and socializing an approach to water heating in retrofit and emergency replacement scenarios.

Summary Information

Budget: \$199,850

Building Type: Single family, small multifamily, affordable multifamily

Technology: Heat pump water heater

Recommendation Rationale

Uptake of HPWH's in Colorado is lagging other technologies and further challenged by complicated installs during emergency replacement. This project is led by an experienced team and has a strong dissemination channel through AWHI. Flexible-voltage heat pump water heaters could make emergency water heater replacements easier by avoiding or deferring electrical upgrades, while still allowing higher performance if converted to 240V later.

Slipstream

Heat Pump Rooftop Unit (RTU) Market Accelerator

Description

This project will provide resources for contractors and building owners to help shift unplanned RTU replacement to planned replacement with emphasis on dual fuel RTUs.

The project builds awareness, contractor readiness, and customer confidence through training, reference materials, cost and incentive calculators, procurement guidance, and direct stakeholder engagement. The result will be an RTU electrification playbook that can be scaled across the DRCOG region informed by local context and industry needs.

Summary Information

Budget: \$229,000

Building Type: Commercial (other)

Technology: HVAC

Recommendation Rationale

This proposal targets a commercial building market where heat pump rooftop unit can be easily deployed if contractor and building owner confidence is high. The project team brings strong expertise in developing tools, training and materials for contractors and building owners for a relatively low commercial-sector cost.

Elephant Energy, Inc.

Alternative Electrification Delivery Infrastructure Pilot

Description

Elephant Energy and Gradient will build Colorado's first certified non-licensed installer pathway for 120V window heat pumps, then deploy that workforce across harder-to-serve housing segments such as mobile homes, multifamily housing, ADUs, and renter-occupied units.

The project is intentionally housing-type-agnostic, using mobile home facilities as the initial high-density blueprint for workforce training, deployment logistics, and quality-controlled installation. The result will be a replicable playbook for electrifying the housing segments with quality installation of a newer technology.

Summary Information

Budget: \$200,000

Building Type: Mobile/manufactured, affordable multifamily

Technology: HVAC, controls/load management

Recommendation Rationale

This proposal squarely addresses a market gap by testing whether portable window heat pump technology can be paired with a certified non-licensed installer pathway. The concept is distinct because it is not just a field demonstration of a new technology but also incorporates a novel and robust workforce and program delivery model.

Group14 Engineering

Real-World Beneficial Electrification Strategies and Operating Cost Insights for Colorado Affordable Housing

Description

In partnership with CHFA and affordable housing stakeholders, Group14 will analyze energy data from 25 recently constructed multifamily housing projects to evaluate how electrification strategies, including various heat pump systems, metering configurations, and utility tariff selections, influence real-world operating costs.

The project looks to use findings as reference for affordable housing developers, integrate information into Affordable Housing tax credit applications.

Summary Information

Budget: \$114,975

Building Type: Multifamily, affordable multifamily

Technology: HVAC, CHPWH, panel

Recommendation Rationale

This proposal addresses uncertainty about operational costs and savings with data from real-world best practice projects. The project will address barriers that directly affect funding and early-stage design decisions for affordable housing. The project appears well positioned to produce insights that can influence inform important partners such as CHFA and DOLA.

CMTA, Inc.

Denver Public Schools - Strategic, District-Wide Mechanical Systems Framework

Description

Denver Public Schools proposes decision-making tools for renovations and upgrades which considers factors beyond initial capital costs over the typical bond cycle.

Long-term planning approaches funded by this project will guide district-wide conceptual design toward electrified systems, incorporating lifecycle costs, building emissions, and replacement costs into future capital planning. Outputs will provide a toolkit and budgetary approach for similar building portfolios and bonded projects state-wide.

Summary Information

Budget: \$190,000

Building Type: Commercial (community facilities)

Technology: HVAC, CHPWH, panel, controls/load management

Recommendation Rationale

As a visible public institution, working with DPS offers a high impact story for Power Ahead Colorado funding and a credible path to broader replication if the framework proves effective. It could also provide a planning model for a building segment where scalable solutions remain limited.

Zero Homes

Project Lightspeed

Description

Zero Homes will pilot a Track 2 solution combining two innovations:

1. opening a remote heat-pump design platform to DRCOG contractors at no cost — permanently — to test whether cutting design soft costs by drives an increase in contractor heat-pump adoption and
2. equipping 50 heat pumps across three major manufacturers with standardized monitoring, diagnostics, and grid connectivity to validate sizing and install quality.

The result is a replicable, free-to-contractor model linking high-quality design to verified field performance and demand flexibility across the region.

Summary Information

Budget: \$350,000

Building Type: Single family, small multifamily

Technology: HVAC

Recommendation Rationale

This proposal takes a market-based approach to reducing friction and overcoming barriers to heat pump adoption by focusing on contractor business models, rather than relying solely on customer education or incentives. Through this pilot, all contractors in the region will receive permanent, no-cost access to Zero's remote heat pump evaluation and sizing platform. In addition, the pilot will equip installed heat pumps with advanced monitoring, diagnostics, and grid connectivity capabilities.

Recommended Round 1 project waitlist

The program team also identified the next four highest scoring proposals for a project funding waitlist. If recommended projects do not proceed or additional funding or capacity is identified the team may contract with the following waitlisted projects:

Proposal Name	Lead Organization	Final Score	Funding Request
The Emergency Conversion Pilot: Helping Front Range HVAC Contractors Sell Heat Pumps and Homeowners Get Quality Equipment Faster	Rock Rabbit	83	\$340,000
Longmont On-Bill Repayment Pilot	Collective Clean Energy Fund	81	\$300,000
The DRCOG House Call: A Municipal Heat Pump Concierge Pilot	Pearl Edison Colorado LLC	80	\$262,000
Building Science Alliance	Maize Mechanical	79	\$332,900
A Low-Cost Load Management Solution to Avoid Electrical Upgrade Pilot	Slipstream	78.5	\$216,000

Round 1 proposals interviewed and not recommended for funding

Proposal Name	Lead Organization	Final Score	Funding Request
Coordinated Electrification and Efficiency Targeting Pilot: A Data Fusion Platform for High-Impact Building Upgrades in DRCOG Disadvantaged Communities	Touchstone IQ	77	\$225,000
Thermal Storage Pilot	The Heat Pump Store	77	\$280,000
Preparing Mobile & Manufactured Homes for Electrification	Institute for Social and Environmental Transition (ISET)	74	\$170,200
Emergency HVAC Replacement	Zero Homes	71	\$230,000
From Compliance to Comfort: An Electrification Readiness Accelerator for Underserved Multifamily Buildings	Gradient	64.5	\$300,000
Accelerating Electrification Through Contractor Engagement	Go Electric Colorado	64	\$189,250

Round 1 proposals not advancing to interviews

Proposal Name	Lead Organization	Funding Request
Electrification Discovery Chatbot for the Power Ahead Colorado Contractor Finder	Plentiful.ai	\$199,000
Micro-Targeting Enhanced Electrification Outreach Pilot	Go Electric Colorado	\$316,150
Reducing Barriers to GeoExchange Adoption in Colorado Affordable Housing	Familia Verde	\$275,000
Making multifamily building electrification easier to deliver with all-weather packaged window-mounted heat pumps (PWHPs).	Sustainable Real Estate Solutions (SRS)	\$350,000
Colorado Energy Savings Navigator: Screening from program applications	MyFriendBen	\$259,260
Mobile Home Electrification Pilot	ARUS Consulting LLC	\$350,000
AI-Driven Remote Commissioning Toolbox for the Power Ahead Colorado Program Implementer	Plentiful.ai	\$169,317
Home Energy Labeling Partnership (HELP) - Colorado	Earth Advantage	\$198,000
Building-Specific Home Electrification Roadmap for DRCOG Homeowners on PowerAheadColorado.org	Plentiful.ai	\$199,685
Commercial Electrification Opportunity Desk	Colorado Market Intelligence LLC	\$225,000
Demand-Ready Home Incentive Pilot	COSSA Institute	\$299,500
Micro Grid for Whole Home Electrification	My Electric Home	\$297,000
Fill Once, File Everywhere: Automating Contractor Paperwork for Electrification Projects	Plentiful.ai	\$173,395



Questions?



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