

Frequently-Asked Questions

1. What are the Maryland Energy Administration (MEA) Resilient Microgrid Grants?

The purpose of these grants are to provide Maryland organizations with facilities assessment/planning, early project funding and training funding to enable energy infrastructure assessments, plan creation, clean energy design, financial modeling and training funds resulting in projects that protect critical energy sources and the safety of communities during a crisis. The Optimize approach typically includes more than one building and workforce training and curriculum development for long-term community capacity-building. Optimize secures the balance of private project capital required for capital-constrained clients.

2. What are the amounts of the three MEA grants, among others, Optimize obtains for clients?

Optimize has been 100% in awards received for proposals submitted for clients at no cost to clients.

- (1) The MEA's Area-of-Interest 1 (AOI-1) Planning Grants are for up to **\$125,000** carried out up to an 18-month period. Optimize prefers to complete the assessment and plan in a year or less.
- (2) The MEA's Area-of-Interest 2 (AOI-2) Microgrid Construction Grants are intended to help with the most challenging funding to obtain in the project value chain. Up to **\$1.5 million** is available per project.
- (3) The newest grant we manage for clients is the MEA's Higher Education Clean Energy Pilot Grant of typically **\$1.15 million** enabling both master planning and for curriculum development, applied learning via our projects, training, certifications and 4-year clean energy concentration degrees.

3. Does it cost anything in money or time for Optimize clients?

No. Optimize raises all public and private funds at its own cost and risk, enabling its services to be paid for by grant funds we raise for clients while also being able to pay student interns for contributions to our clients' Plan development and project execution. No new FTEs or additional work time is needed from clients.

4. What is resiliency?

Resiliency is the act of protecting an organization or community's critical energy sources and infrastructure ensuring the safety of people and the function of key operating systems in the event of a crisis. This can include such objectives as: A designated Facility of Refuge building, security/police, IT infrastructure, critical research labs/vaccines, and secure government sites, among others.

5. How does the contract / start-up process work with MEA, Optimize, and awardees of grants?

For four years now, the MEA has made grants available to applicants across Maryland. The process usually kicks off in September with applications due in January/February and awards announced in May/June. Optimize seeks to submit proposals by October since it's essentially first-come first-serve funding availability.

Optimize, at its own cost and risk, writes the grant proposals on behalf of clients after the co-signing of an agreed-upon services contract that kicks in ONLY if a grant is awarded. Awarded funds go to clients directly. Clients pay Optimize monthly from these funds. Payments are timed in conjunction with the preparation (by Optimize) and submission (by the Grantee) of monthly reports and reimbursement requests due by 10th of each month. Clients typically apply a maximum of up to 30 minutes for the monthly project team call.

6. How does the month-to-month process work between Optimize and clients?

Optimize works according to 'ground rules' defined in advance with clients, including Optimize preparing the monthly reports mentioned above (submitted in turn by the Grantee by the 10th of the month). Prior to that date, the client's primary contact checks in with Optimize on a virtual 30-minute Monthly Report Call. Additionally, starting three months into the project, the Client's designated Core Team participates in a monthly virtual Status and Strategy meeting to define, align, and efficiently carry out assessment and planning actions (also led and completed by Optimize). From the client's side, the program is usually supported primarily by leadership, facilities management, communications, and others with a stake in the project. Client time expended is minimal focused usually with no more than up-to a 30 minute monthly call together.

7. Besides the Plan and early Construction funding (thanks MEA!), how else can a client benefit?

Optimize strongly recommends and facilitates all aspects of workforce training and academic curriculum opportunities associated with the microgrid project, even offering access to an established mentor University for guidance/coaching, if desired. The client supports the identification of – or is itself – a higher-education institution, and typically commits up to \$10,000 of the MEA grant funds to cover paid internships for its students or those with geographic proximity. In support of this, the client facilitates the identification of administrative and faculty champions motivated to engage with world class clean energy and community capacity-building professionals. Optimize is quite familiar with the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC), the Maryland Department of Labor, EARN, and Apprenticeship Grants, and has to-date volunteered its time to manage nine interns. These interns benefit from applied learning while contributing to the substance of a client's Plan development. The scale-up of student interns, faculty-sponsored clean energy programs, certifications, and 4-year degrees in the fastest-growing job sector in the country are unique benefits of the Optimize approach. Our methodology also leaves behind the long-term local benefit of a trainer-of-trainers system using real projects in the community for a long-term investment and return.

8. Why Optimize and what are its credentials?

Members of the Optimize Management Team have been leaders and innovators in the renewables field globally since the early 1990s, building clean energy policy, manufacturing, development, and financial innovations to-scale. With a two-decade history in Maryland, they have created more than 1,200 jobs in the state. Employers of the CEO, Len Jornlin, and core team include the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, SunEdison (co-founder), BP Solar, Bonneville Power, Goldman Sachs and the leading micro-enterprise development NGO,. The core team has created more than 2.5 gigawatts of installed renewable generation projects, built over \$2.4 billion of public-private project funds, and created 1200 micro enterprises and training initiatives over 30 years in 40+ countries. Our Optimize approach uniquely catalyzes immediate client benefits while also leaving behind self-managed community benefits for regional population.

We welcome to provide client references upon request. To-date Optimize has written and managed 17 grant proposals for clients, with an award rate of 100%. This has resulted in \$4.7 million in grants for clients.

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