

Highlights of [GAO-25-107441](#), a report to the Committee on Indian Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why This Matters

Tribes can get important economic benefits from energy projects on their lands, such as revenue for government operations. The Department of Energy's (DOE) Tribal Energy Financing Program (TEFP) offers loans and loan guarantees for such projects.

However, Tribes may be experiencing barriers to participation, which could limit development of untapped energy resources on tribal lands.

GAO Key Takeaways

Since its first solicitation in 2018, TEPF has received 20 applications for loans and loan guarantees for various project types and amounts. Requests ranged from \$23.7 million for a solar project to \$8.7 billion for an ammonia production facility for low-carbon fuel. DOE's Loan Programs Office, which manages TEPF, has closed one loan guarantee and no loans. According to DOE officials, seven other applications were active as of July 18, 2025.

Tribes said TEPF can finance a variety of energy projects needed for energy production and economic development. However, aspects of TEPF's design and implementation create barriers. For example, DOE hires outside lawyers and technical experts to review projects. Tribal applicants are required to cover the costs of these services, which can be high and unpredictable. Tribes may avoid applying for the program until DOE revises its review processes to reduce or eliminate the cost.

Additionally, there are few DOE program staff with tribal experience to review applications, which can lengthen reviews. Without staff with the necessary expertise, Tribes may continue to experience barriers to securing TEPF financing.

Status of All 20 Applications to the Department of Energy's (DOE) Tribal Energy Financing Program, as of February 2025

Intake Part I



Intake Part II



Due diligence



Conditional commitment through closing



Closed



One active application



One inactive application

Source: GAO analysis of DOE Loan Programs Office data; GAO (icons). | GAO-25-107441

Note: Active applications include closed loans, which DOE has finalized with the applicant and continues to monitor throughout the loan term. Inactive applications have been put on hold, withdrawn, or abandoned. DOE officials confirmed that they had not received any new applications for the program as of July 18, 2025.

How GAO Did This Study

We analyzed agency data and documents and interviewed agency officials, potential tribal participants, and tribal stakeholders. We compared agency efforts with relevant laws, regulations, guidance, and executive orders.

What GAO Recommends

We are making five recommendations to DOE, including that it revise its review process to reduce fees. We are also recommending that DOE maintain designated staff to review TEPF applications and provide them more training.

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