

FOSTERING EQUITY THROUGH COMMUNITY-LED CLEAN ENERGY STRATEGIES

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October 2021
ACEEE Report

ACEEE
American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy

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About ACEEE

The **American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy** (ACEEE) is a nonprofit research organization that develops policies to reduce energy waste and combat climate change. Its independent analysis advances investments, programs, and behaviors that use energy more effectively and help build an equitable clean energy future.

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Acknowledgments

The report was made possible through the generous support of the Kresge Foundation. The authors gratefully acknowledge external reviewers, internal reviewers, colleagues, and sponsors who supported this report.

The authors are grateful for the external reviews provided by the following experts, including Ansha Zaman, Center for Earth, Energy, and Democracy; Natalia Brown, Catalyst Miami; Daphany Rose Sanchez, Kinetic Communities Consulting; Clarke Gocker, Luz Velez, and Lou DeJesus, People United for Sustainable Housing Buffalo; Denise Fairchild, Emerald Cities Collaborative; Kathryn Wright, Urban Sustainability Directors Network; and Yasmin Yacoby,

U.S. Department of Energy. Note that external review and support do not imply affiliation or endorsement.

The authors are also grateful to internal reviewers at ACEEE, including David Ribeiro, Director of Local Policy; Stefen Samarripas, Local Policy Manager; Mary Shoemaker, Senior Research Analyst; Lauren Ross, Senior Director for Policy; and Steve Nadel, Executive Director. Last, we would like to thank Mary Robert Carter for managing the editorial process, Mariel Wolfson for developmental editing, Keri Schreiner for copyediting, Roxanna Usher and Sean O'Brien for proofreading, Kate Doughty for graphics support, and Wendy Koch and Ben Somberg for their help in launching this report.

Suggested Citation

Ayala, R., A. Drehobl, and A. Dewey. 2021. *Fostering Equity through Community-Led Clean Energy Strategies*. Washington, DC: American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy. [aceee.org/research-report/u2105](https://www.aceee.org/research-report/u2105).

Executive Summary

KEY FINDINGS

- Community-led clean energy strategies are well suited to address inequities in the clean energy sector and lead to more equitable outcomes.
- Local governments and other decision makers can address inequities in the development and implementation of policies and programs by creating pathways for community-based organizations (CBOs) and community members to define and drive decision-making processes and embed accountability structures into the evaluation of success.
- We analyze strategies across 32 CBOs that are working to advance community-led clean energy outcomes. We identified six key strategies CBOs use to advance robust and equitable clean energy initiatives and programs.
- We identify actions that local governments can adopt and embrace to collaborate with, fund, and support community-led efforts to advance equitable clean energy outcomes.

The Importance of Community-Led Clean Energy

Historic policies and exclusionary decision-making processes have led to inequitable economic, social, and intergenerational outcomes that continue to exclude community-led participation, decision-making, and accountability processes in the clean energy sector. Decision makers within local governments—as well as states and utilities—have the potential to take more equity-centered, community-engaged approaches to clean energy decision-making processes, implementation, and accountability. Decision makers can explore the dimensions of equity—including structural, procedural, distributional, and transgenerational equity—to determine how they can create, enact, and implement policies and programs that address these dimensions. Partnering directly with communities and/or organizations committed to serving local residents can better center the needs and priorities of residents in policy and program design and delivery, ultimately helping to ensure equitable outcomes.

Community-government partnerships can better address longstanding disparities, drive authentic community engagement processes, ensure that most residents benefit from clean energy services and programs, and develop solutions that benefit future generations. The involvement of community members and organizations in clean energy policy and program decisions can help ensure that communities that have been historically marginalized and impacted by policy and program outcomes shape future policies and programs, creating a more just and equitable clean energy landscape.

METHODOLOGY

Our research first identified ways in which clean energy policies and programs are being driven and shaped by communities. Second, we identified strategies that exist across community-led clean energy efforts, especially as they are centered around promoting equity. Through a literature review, we identified 20 reports and resources on community-driven clean energy programs and strategies. In combination with outreach to CBOs, this review identified 32 CBOs that are working to advance equitable clean energy developments in their local communities. We conducted a qualitative assessment of the CBOs' goals, strategies, and operations to identify major themes across community-led efforts. The strategies we outline represent the most common themes that emerged based on the literature review, qualitative assessment, and interviews. We selected five CBOs with which to conduct in-depth interviews to inform our cases studies. In addition, we engaged directly with seven CBOs working on clean energy advocacy to review and verify our findings from the literature review and qualitative assessment.

COMMUNITY-FOCUSED STRATEGIES IN ACTION

Our analysis found that CBOs are helping to build equitable clean energy policies and outcomes in local communities. CBO efforts aim to promote health and energy affordability, expand community resilience through distributed energy generation, bolster the local workforce, and build the wealth of residents in marginalized communities. We found six community-led strategies:

- Participate in formal policy processes.
- Develop accountability frameworks and direct oversight.
- Build influence through partnerships and coalitions.
- Deliver clean energy services to maximize benefits to local communities.
- Develop community-led workforce programs and trainings.
- Build longstanding capacity in communities for locally led clean energy efforts.

CBOs and community members use these strategies to maximize the benefits of community-led clean energy in the communities they serve. Other leaders and local organizations can leverage these strategies to empower their own communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Collaborations between CBOs and decision makers can support more equitable and just energy systems and outcomes. Authentic and accountable engagement with CBOs can help to define and drive clean energy program development and decision-making processes toward equitable outcomes. For CBOs, these strategies can help ensure that local decision-making processes are accountable to and reflective of local community needs. CBOs can

embrace multiple strategies to advance energy equity in their communities, such as offering feedback through public engagement processes, holding decision makers accountable through policy evaluations and campaigns, collaborating with other community organizations to share resources and expertise, and developing targeted clean energy programming.

Local governments and other decision makers can support community-led clean energy initiatives through several actions, including creating equitable community engagement processes to empower CBOs; authorizing decision-making power to advisory boards; compensating CBOs and community members for their time, work, and expertise; funding CBOs to create policy recommendations or evaluations to guide the city's energy equity outcomes; offering funding for clean energy job training; building community trust; hiring CBOs as third-party implementors for clean energy programs; and offering funding to sustain and complete community-led programs.

Introduction

Many local governments across the United States have taken the lead in making commitments to decarbonize their economies, reduce energy use, and ramp-up other clean energy solutions, such as renewable energy and energy efficiency investments.¹ ACEEE's *2020 City Clean Energy Scorecard* measures progress on the clean energy policies and efforts of 100 cities (Ribeiro et al. 2020). Between April 2019 and May 2020, the local governments of the 100 largest U.S. cities enacted more than 160 initiatives to advance clean energy efforts. About 10% of the metrics in the *Scorecard* focus on equity-focused policies, programs, and outcomes, such as the extent to which such efforts involve community members and seek to target investments toward underserved households. While the report demonstrates that one-third of the cities have increased their efforts to achieve equitable outcomes for marginalized groups, all cities have substantial room to improve or adopt new robust approaches to equity-driven clean energy engagement and decision making, and to work toward accountability (Ribeiro et al. 2020).²

Defining Equity in Clean Energy

Equity in clean energy represents policies and programs that are informed by the community's input and designed to meet the needs of all its residents. Equitable clean energy policies and programs are based on the principle that each action taken must not deepen existing social, environmental, or economic inequalities; such actions must instead address historic and systemic inequities.

Cities can improve their approaches to equitable clean energy planning by empowering and engaging community-based leaders and organizations in the development of clean energy solutions. Community-based organizations (CBOs) stand to gain from these partnerships by enhancing services and benefits to their communities through providing input, guidance, and accountability to local decision makers.³ In particular, CBOs are well positioned to offer

¹ Throughout this paper, we use the term *clean energy* to describe projects, solutions, initiatives, evaluations, investments, programs, and/or policies that relate to energy efficiency and renewable energy.

² We define marginalized communities as those most impacted by community decision making and whose life outcomes are disproportionately affected by social structures. These groups may include people of color, low-income residents, youth, the elderly, recently arrived immigrants, those with limited English proficiency, people with disabilities, and the homeless. In some contexts, marginalized communities may be referred to as disadvantaged or underserved communities.

³ Community-based organizations (CBOs) are representative of a community or significant segments of a community and provide financial, educational, and/or other resources aimed at enhancing health, wealth, and overall community well-being. For this report, we excluded large nonprofits that have a particular area of focus beyond the local level.

support and guidance to local governments to foster inclusive, accessible, authentic engagement, and representation in clean energy decision-making processes and policy and program outcomes. Partnerships between CBOs and local governments are vital to advancing equitable clean energy actions and to ensuring that all constituents have access to, and benefit from, clean energy services.

HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

This report analyzes strategies across 32 CBOs that advance community-led and equity-driven clean energy outcomes. CBOs that are looking to advance equitable, local clean energy investments can use this report as a resource to identify effective strategies and examples from other CBOs that have successfully benefited their communities. In addition, this report offers guidance to local governments seeking to collaborate with and support CBOs; doing so can address inequities in clean energy policy and program development, implementation, and evaluation, as well as strengthen local governments' relationships with the communities they serve. Many of these strategies are also applicable for decision makers at the federal, state, and utility level, and lessons learned for cities can be explored across these other decision-making levels.

This report contributes to the growing body of literature to advance equitable, inclusive, and resilient clean energy initiatives at the local scale. This research also builds on the decades of work from CBOs across the country that have been enacting these strategies for many years. To our knowledge, this report is unique in its effort to catalogue strategies that CBOs and other community leaders utilize to increase and expand equitable clean energy outcomes in their communities.

How Community-Led Clean Energy Advances Equitable Outcomes

FOUR DIMENSIONS OF EQUITY

Since 2013, local governments across the United States and Canada have worked through the Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN) to incorporate equity considerations in environmental policymaking and implementation (Park 2014). In response, the network developed a shared understanding of four components that should be considered and integrated in the development of sustainability goals, programs, and policies.

For this report, we use this framework of equitable sustainability practices to conceptualize the ways in which the actions of CBOs and local governments are advancing equitable outcomes. CBOs and decision makers who work with marginalized communities can use this

framework to assess the extent to which their policy and program outcomes reflect inclusive community engagement, result in a fair distribution of benefits and burdens for residents, and ensure overall desired outcomes. Figure 1 offers more detail on the four dimensions of equity.

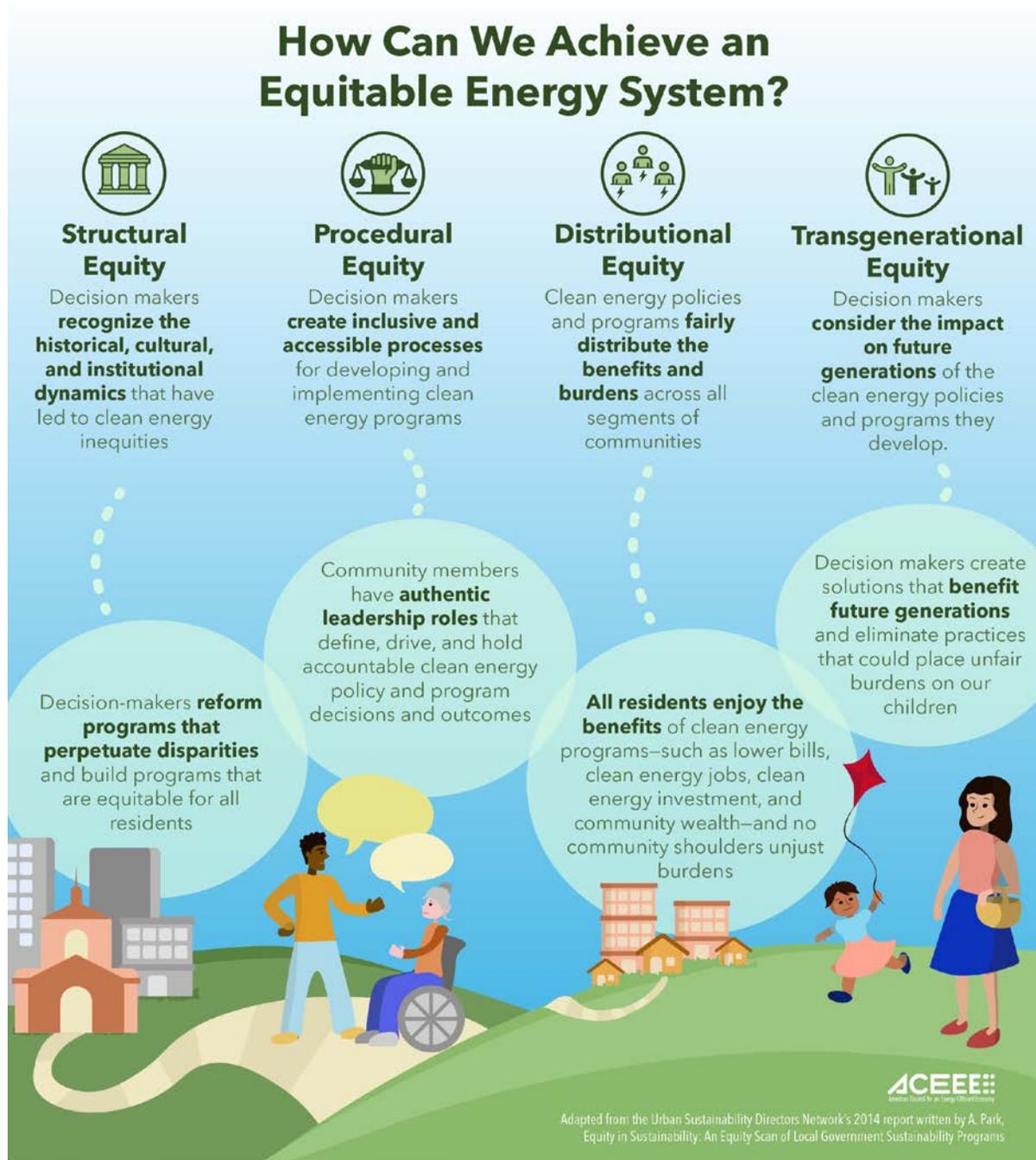


Figure 1. Achieving an equitable energy system

THE POTENTIAL FOR ACHIEVING EQUITABLE CLEAN ENERGY THROUGH LOCAL GOVERNMENT-CBO PARTNERSHIPS

Policymakers in cities and CBOs can work together toward outcomes that advance the four dimensions of equity. By engaging with CBOs, policymakers and the decision makers supporting them can address inequities in decision-making processes, thereby advancing procedural equity. For CBOs, working with local governments can help ensure that the community is involved in policymaking processes and that those processes are accountable to the community.

Partnerships between local governments and CBOs can also improve outcomes related to distributional, structural, and transgenerational equity; doing so would better ensure that city investments and solutions are fairly distributed while building wealth in historically marginalized communities. For decision makers, collaboration with CBOs can support program development that is designed to serve all city residents while addressing inequities caused by past policies. For local governments, authentic partnerships with CBOs can provide program guidance and enhance community engagement. Engaging with CBOs can also help build trust between communities and governments, reestablishing relationships that may have been broken in the past. Substantial partnerships with local government can also help CBOs to ensure that taxpayer money is equitably distributed to communities and use policy to address structural marginalization.

We recognize that decision-making processes in the energy sector are not always inclusive or conducive to equitable outcomes for communities. The community-led strategies highlighted in this report do operate within existing decision-making systems, and we acknowledge that equitable solutions may exist outside of these systems. For example, shifting the clean energy sector toward a model of Energy Democracy can move the energy sector toward equitable clean energy systems (CJA 2021). Energy Democracy represents a shift away from a corporate-owned, fossil fuel-focused economy to one in which communities own energy-generating resources and lead energy decision-making processes (CJA 2021). Energy Democracy aims to create an energy system that is designed not to harm the environment but to instead support local economic development and the health and well-being of all people. Some of the strategies in this report can support movements such as Energy Democracy, as well as other efforts that work outside current decision-making structures and processes. In addition, decision makers can develop and enact policies that shift communities toward energy systems with more community-led decision-making power. Future research can explore strategies for working both within and outside of current political structures to move us toward a more just, democratic, and equitable energy system.

Methodology

We conducted a literature review of relevant policy reports, academic literature, and media and blog posts from the past six years, focusing on community-driven planning, community engagement, energy justice, energy democracy, equitable clean energy programs, CBO planning engagement, and policy processes. Through this literature review, we identified 20 reports and resources that address how communities drive and shape clean energy.

We conducted in-depth interviews in December 2020 and January 2021 to inform case studies with five CBOs: Isles, Inc.; People United for Sustainable Housing (PUSH) Buffalo; Center for Earth, Energy, and Democracy (CEED); Kinetic Communities Consulting (KC3); and Catalyst Miami. We explored the development of clean energy initiatives, overall organizational funding, key partnerships, challenges and benefits of community-led clean energy, and recommendations for other CBOs and partners. We also engaged directly with seven CBOs working on clean energy advocacy, programs, and policies to inform our findings from the literature review and qualitative assessment.⁴

Through the literature review, we identified 32 CBOs working to advance clean energy in their local communities. To identify strategies, we reviewed each CBO's mission statement; an overview of services, programs, and initiatives they offer; and, when possible, any impacts and/or outcomes of their programs and advocacy work. Through this review and the case study interviews, we identified six common strategies to drive community-led clean energy outcomes. The strategies outlined in this report represent the most common approaches CBOs employed to drive clean energy developments at the local level.

Appendix A has more information about the 32 CBOs identified through our research; it includes the organizations' location and mission, and it identifies an example of one of the six strategies that the organizations employ to advance their work.

Findings: Six Strategies for Community-Driven Clean Energy

Community-driven clean energy investments can offer many benefits to local communities. Such investments can build community wealth and resources, create new jobs, improve

⁴ The seven CBOs we engaged with are Catalyst Miami; Center for Earth, Energy, and Democracy; Cleveland Neighborhood Progress; Isles, Inc.; Kinetic Communities Consulting; Partnership for Southern Equity; and Verde.

health and energy affordability, and increase resilience through distributed energy generation. Community-led clean energy efforts often center equity in engagement, governance, and economic development. Local governments and other decision makers can partner with CBOs both to create pathways that empower residents to define and drive decision-making processes as well as embed accountability structures into processes and outcomes, which can ensure that decision makers create and implement programs and policies that best meet community needs. CBOs can exercise strategies that effectively maximize the benefits of clean energy policies and programs in the communities they serve.

Figure 2 shows the six strategies that CBOs use to drive clean energy outcomes in local communities:



Figure 2. Community-led strategies for advancing equitable clean energy outcomes

Each strategy addresses equity across procedural, structural, distribution, and transgenerational dimensions. We recognize that access to resources, social and health outcomes, and political landscape will differ across local and state governments and utility service territories. CBOs may use different strategies to achieve varying outcomes depending on these local and available resources. Local governments can support CBO strategies to drive clean energy to best fit their needs and capacity. Decision makers and CBOs can also

consider their context and pursue strategies that best support their community's needs and goals.

PARTICIPATE IN FORMAL POLICY PROCESSES

Historically, decision makers have often failed to use inclusive community engagement processes, which has resulted in policies and programs that do not always reflect the needs and interests of the communities they intend to serve; this is especially true of historically marginalized communities (Lewis, Hernandez, and Geronimus 2019; Obias and Yoko-Young 2020; Ramanan et al. 2021). By formally participating in policy processes, CBOs can address procedural equity by ensuring that community members and/or CBOs hold leadership roles that help define and drive planning and designing of clean energy programs and policies. Formal participation in stakeholder engagement processes can institutionalize accountability so that decision makers who request expertise and feedback respond to the input of community participants (Lynch et al. 2020). Participation can take many forms, such as providing feedback and support in stakeholder engagement or filling formal roles on decision-making bodies, as we discuss further in the following two sections.

PROVIDE DIRECT FEEDBACK AND SUPPORT THROUGH STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PROCESSES

Local governments can design formal stakeholder engagement processes that include CBOs, local governments, utilities, and other key stakeholders that authentically engage and ensure that CBO input helps to define and drive process outcomes. Formal stakeholder engagement processes can be working groups and/or stakeholder engagement groups that provide a pathway for community members and CBOs to provide input on the design, direction, and implementation of clean energy policies and programs (Curti, Andersson, and Wright 2018; Mohnot, Bishop, and Sanchez 2019). Through such formal and continual engagement processes, CBOs can offer feedback during all stages of the policy process and work to operationalize accountability and ensure that decisions accurately and respectfully represent community interests (Yuen et al. 2017; Ramanan et al. 2021; González 2020).

Stakeholder engagement processes work best when they are accessible, with local governments and other decision makers working to remove barriers to participation (Facilitating Power et al. 2018). Ensuring that processes meet community needs around location, time, and engagement format helps ensure robust participation (Curti, Andersson, and Wright 2018; Ramanan et al. 2021). Decision makers can also offer multiple types of engagement to address barriers and foster engagement. Decision makers can establish an equitable engagement process by financially compensating CBOs and/or community members for their expertise and labor when participating in a community engagement

process, providing direct feedback, and/or implementing a program (Curti, Andersson, and Wright 2018; Ramanan et al. 2021). Strategies for compensation can include allocating a certain percentage of a policy or program's budget for CBOs, offering subawards to CBOs, and/or creating flexible budgets that ensure CBO compensation (Mohnot, Bishop, and Sanchez 2019). With proper financial compensation, decision makers can avoid transactional relationships that simply extract knowledge and information that is otherwise not readily available, and fairly recognize and acknowledge the work, time, and expertise of CBOs (Obias and Yoko-Young 2020). Additional forms of compensation beyond financial stipends for time and participation can include transportation costs, waived fees for trainings or events, childcare support, and food.

Some cities have created formal community-participation platforms for community members and CBOs to advise city leaders on climate action plans and other clean energy policy development. This strategy can enable community leaders to participate in the decision-making process at the onset, ensuring that equity is embedded into all programs and policies as opposed to being only an afterthought (Hays et al. 2021). For example, in 2016, the City of Providence, Rhode Island, founded the Racial and Environmental Justice Committee (REJC) to integrate the concerns and needs of marginalized communities into the city's sustainability work and decision-making processes (City of Providence 2017). The committee consists of 10 community members who identify as Black, Indigenous, and/or a person of color and five local government officials. Each committee member receives a \$1,300 stipend as well as childcare support during meetings; accommodations for people with disabilities and interpretation or translation are also provided (City of Providence 2021). The committee directly integrates voices and concerns of people of color into equitable and sustainable community development decision-making processes (City of Providence 2019). In 2019, the REJC and the City of Providence Offices of Sustainability co-developed the city's Climate Justice Plan. The Plan outlines strategies and recommendations for carbon-reductions targets in buildings and transportation sectors while promoting an equitable and just transition from fossil fuels (City of Providence 2019). Importantly, the REJC was the first to draft the Climate Justice Plan, ensuring that its voice and the voices of the communities it represents were not superseded by others.

In 2017, the City of Seattle, Washington, created an Environmental Justice Committee with the goal of giving those most-affected by environmental inequities an opportunity to have ownership of the city's Equity & Environmental Agenda implementation processes as well as to connect city governments to community-led solutions. The committee consists of 12 members with diverse backgrounds and expertise who work with and/or are from communities of color or are immigrants and refugees, Native and Indigenous peoples, low-income, and/or English-language learners (City of Seattle 2021). Some committee members

are representatives of CBOs, such as Got Green and Puget Sound Sage.⁵ The committee members serve two-year terms and meet monthly, and the committee serves as a pathway for CBOs to impact and offer community-based solutions to city departments around environmental program and policy design (City of Seattle 2021). The Environmental Justice Committee also advises city staff on the implementation of Seattle’s Equity & Environment Agenda, which outlines the goals and strategies guiding the city to advance environmental justice and equity (City of Seattle 2016).

FILL FORMAL DECISION-MAKING ROLES IN ESTABLISHED COMMITTEES, BOARDS, AND ADVISORY COUNCILS

Local decision makers can also give CBOs and community members formal decision-making power and influence over policy decisions by designating seats on formal decision-making bodies such as committees, boards, and advisory councils (Baker, DeVar, and Prakash 2019). Holding these positions enables CBO participants to drive outcomes and exercise decision-making power during the scoping, development, implementation, and evaluation of policies and/or programs. Also, this can grant CBOs the power to direct long-term funding and oversight when the city implements clean energy investments in marginalized communities. In this role, CBOs can define and drive policies, working with elected officials and policymakers to translate solutions into policy reforms, develop accountability metrics, and organize education forums in collaboration with local government staff (González 2020). Decision makers can support CBOs by ensuring that they are accountable to the guidance and input CBOs directly provide on committees, boards, and advisory councils, and that their input drives policy and program outcomes (Baker, DeVar, and Prakash 2019).

While uncommon, some cities have developed bodies that share decision-making powers with marginalized communities. For example, in 2018, Portland voters created the Portland Clean Energy Fund (PCEF) through a ballot initiative launched by a community-led coalition whose members represented the racial, ethnic, and economic diversity of Portland (PCEF 2020). This grassroots coalition—including CBOs, environmental organizations, faith leaders, labor organizations, and other community-members—led a multiyear campaign that culminated in the initiative’s passage. The PCEF, administered by the City of Portland,

⁵ Got Green is a South Seattle-based CBO led by people of color and low-income people. The organization’s mission is to create environmental, racial, and economic justice in communities. Puget Sound Sage is an organization that strives to strengthen the local community’s ability to influence and advocate for policies that center racial and social equity.

provides funding for climate action that advances racial and social justice (City of Portland 2021a). PCEF receives funding from a business license surcharge levied on large retailers in Portland. Verde, a nonprofit organization dedicated to serving low-income communities in Northeast Portland is a member of the committee; it works collaboratively with other coalition members to provide funding recommendations to the mayor and city council and evaluate the fund's effectiveness in advancing racial and social justice (City of Portland 2021a). In April 2021, the Portland City Council approved PCEF's funding recommendations, which awarded a total of \$8.6 million to fund 45 grants to 38 organizations. Seven grants are intended for projects on energy efficiency and renewable energy, with an emphasis on offering deep energy retrofits to low-income households (City of Portland 2021b). PCEF prioritizes projects that aim to benefit underserved populations and neighborhoods, which include communities of color and low-income residents. Examples of these projects include solar panels and energy efficiency upgrades on multifamily housing and new workforce training programs in clean energy (City of Portland 2021a).

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR CBOs:

- Participate in public engagement processes and advocate for more equitable processes that are held accountable to community direction and input.
- Advocate for decision-making bodies that share power with community members to directly define and drive policy priorities, outcomes, and processes.

SUGGESTED ACTIONS FOR DECISION MAKERS:

- Give decision-making power to community-based advisory boards. To enable equitable change in cities, advisory boards should (1) be representative of the community, and (2) set aside seats for members or representatives of marginalized communities. Local governments can give members of these advisory boards decision-making power to define and drive policy and program design, implementation, and outcomes, with accountability measures baked in.
- Direct investments, funding, and policies to community-owned solar projects, with a focus on low-communities.
- Ensure that engagement processes are not overly cumbersome for participants and offer support and guidance to help CBOs navigate engagement processes.
- Compensate community residents who are working on policy and project development, implementation, and/or evaluation by offering stipends to reimburse them for their time, contributions, and expertise.

For this strategy, we highlight the interactions between Center for Earth Energy and Democracy (CEED) and the Energy Efficiency Peer Learning Cohort. As the box below describes, this formal stakeholder engagement consists of local government staff, CBOs, and

academic researchers that meet with local organizations to assess the city's current energy efficiency delivery structure and increase participation in existing energy efficiency programs for low-income communities and communities of color.

Center for Earth Energy and Democracy (CEED) and Energy Efficiency Peer Learning Cohort

Overview

Based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, CEED is a nonprofit, community-based organization that works collaboratively with other CBOs, policymakers, and researchers to ensure that communities in the cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul have tools and resources to support just, sustainable energy and environmental policies. CEED works with CBOs, local chapters of environmental organizations, city staff, community action program (CAP) agencies, and county staff to advance equitable clean energy efforts. CEED provides research and conducts education around energy affordability and sustainable community development to grassroots communities, with the goal of helping them make informed decisions around policies and programs affecting their communities (CEED 2021b). CEED's work around climate and energy research, analysis, and advocacy is made possible by grants, as well as by fees accrued from workshops given to key stakeholders, such as city staff or legislatures.

Project Description

To advance its mission, CEED creates and implements training and workshops for other CBOs to support and increase their capacity to advocate around energy and climate-related programs and policies (CEED 2021a). In 2019, CEED participated in a planning team with the City of Minneapolis Sustainability Division, Community Power, and the Citizens Utility Board of Minnesota to develop the Energy Efficiency Peer Learning Cohort. The team created the cohort program to increase awareness of existing energy efficiency programs in Minneapolis and Saint Paul and ensure that the programs better serve communities of color and renters (CUB of Minnesota 2019). The initial cohort consisted of 10 organizations, including neighborhood associations and housing rights organizations that directly support people of color, low-income residents, and renters with housing advocacy, as well as organizations that provide services such as lead removal and rental assistance. The cohort met once a month from June 2019 through June 2020 to provide educational and advocacy resources on the intersection between housing and energy efficiency and on the current energy landscape in the Twin Cities. In addition, members assessed current energy efficiency programs and provided recommendations on how they could redesign both their programs and their outreach methods to better serve renters, communities of color, and low-income residents.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the cohort was unable to hold a planned public session to inform local leadership and utilities on their recommendations. However, one of the cohort members received a research grant from the Minnesota Department of Commerce to continue its work based on the recommendations produced during its time with the cohort.

Challenges

During the first cohort, CEED and the other planning team members found that smaller organizations faced challenges with both staffing and funding capacity. The cohort plans to deploy strategies to better accommodate members from smaller organizations by engaging with cohort members on a one-on-one basis rather than mandating large group meetings. In the cohort's second cycle, it adapted its outreach efforts to better reflect members' interests. During the first cohort, many members indicated that they wanted to learn more about regulatory processes and gain skills around how to engage with Public Utility Commission dockets. So, for the second cycle, the cohort incorporated sessions on how regulatory processes work, how to submit comments to the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission, strategies for large-scale advocacy, and energy education.

Outcomes

Toward the end of the first cohort cycle, members indicated that the energy efficiency cohort equipped them with the skills and knowledge to participate in and facilitate and lead clean energy initiatives. For instance, some cohort members received support to submit comments regarding Xcel Energy's integrated resource plan (IRP).⁶ For many, this was their first time participating in a regulatory process. Other cohort members independently hosted and led energy workshops in their local communities that provided an overview of available energy efficiency programs, information on how to access energy efficiency resources, and shared educational materials on the importance of energy efficiency. The project planning team distributed the remaining funds from the cohort cycle to support these workshops. The Energy Efficiency Cohort is currently in its second cycle (2020–2021), which has a larger focus on energy efficiency policy advocacy.

Advice from CEED

⁶ The goal of an integrated resource plan (IRP) is for utilities to create a long-term plan to ensure that their customers have access to reliable service. The plan guides utilities in preparing for future energy efficiency, generation, transmission, and distribution of investments. Some public utility commissions require utilities to submit an IRP and will also review the plan (Lazar 2016).

CEED emphasizes the importance of finding and collaborating with partners who have similar values, as well as of looking beyond those working in the energy advocacy space. CEED found that working with organizations that provide direct benefits to communities around health, housing, and workforce development aligns with CEED's values and mission, and helps it achieve its goals.

Source: A. Zaman, policy coordinator, CEED, pers. comm., December 17, 2020

DEVELOP ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORKS AND DIRECT OVERSIGHT

CBOs can hold local governments accountable to their policy commitments by creating recommendations for policy processes or evaluations, either directly for local governments or through other funding or support. By holding decision makers accountable to their equitable clean energy commitments, CBOs can work to address structural, distributional, and procedural equity, while ensuring accountability. Without adequate accountability measures in place, clean energy goals, programs, and/or policies may lack transparency and lead to negative unintended consequences such as contributing to gentrification and acute poverty (Lynch et al. 2020; ECC 2019).

DEVELOP FRAMEWORKS AND DIRECT OVERSIGHT

While not a common strategy, local governments or other funders can support CBOs in developing frameworks to effectively assess and evaluate whether existing clean energy efforts are equitably serving and reaching marginalized groups. CBOs can also provide oversight on clean energy targets or action plans to ensure that short- and long-term goals are being achieved and are meeting the needs of the community (Ramanan et al. 2021; Facilitating Power et al. 2018). This approach gives CBOs and communities the ability to better define and drive outcomes, identify indicators of success, and enact the most effective solutions (ECC 2019). By supporting CBOs as they help create or evaluate policies, local governments take an intentional step toward redistributing decision-making and planning power in a way that builds on community strengths, expertise, and priorities (Curti, Andersson, and Wright 2018).

Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice (DWEJ) is a community-based environmental justice organization dedicated to eradicating the environmental burdens disproportionately experienced by minority and low-income communities in Detroit. DWEJ received support from various foundations and private donations to develop a climate action plan with

recommended strategies that city staff and others can consider to ensure healthy built environments and lower energy bills, bolster a locally based food economy, and improve the well-being of residents impacted by climate change (DWEJ 2021). The plan was informed by the Detroit Climate Action Collaborative, which included nonprofit organizations, businesses, educational institutions, and government entities. The goal was to create a plan that creates climate-resilient communities across five themes: solid waste; public health; businesses and institutions; parks, public spaces, and water infrastructure; and homes and neighborhoods (DWEJ 2017). The plan includes energy efficiency as a strategy in neighborhood and business sectors, identifying actions to make homes more durable, lower energy costs, and reduce the greenhouse gas emissions from businesses and institutions (DWEJ 2017). Although the city has not formally adopted the plan, the plan provides a model and road map to follow to achieve equitable environmental justice goals.

PROVIDE ACCOUNTABILITY AND OVERSIGHT OVER POLICY DECISIONS AND PROGRAM DESIGNS

CBOs can work in partnership with residents and other organizations to ensure accountability for policy and program outcomes. Local governments or other funders can contract with CBOs to evaluate equity outcomes of policies and programs to ensure that the metrics created in partnership with communities are in place to track success (Ribeiro et al. 2020; Lanckton and DeVar 2021; ECC 2019; Baker, Devar, and Prakash 2019; Samarripas 2020). With deep connections to the communities that they serve, CBOs are well positioned to create and inform plans that reflect the needs of all residents (Mohnot, Bishop, and Sanchez 2019).

For example, in 2018, the Environmental Health Coalition (EHC) conducted an independent equity- and environmental-justice-focused evaluation of the City of San Diego's Climate Action plan (Williams and Martinez 2018). The report provides a baseline analysis and recommendations to advance the city's target climate goals with tangible and measurable environmental justice outcomes. The report's recommendations include increasing investments in environmental justice communities recognized in the climate action plan (60% of San Diego's population); tracking and reporting funding for investments in environmental justice communities; establishing a hiring committee consisting of community members and organizations; and hiring a new full-time environmental justice specialist to work on the climate action plan (Williams and Martinez 2018).

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR CBOs:

- Develop plans and policy recommendations for local governments using a community-centered approach.

- Hold decision makers accountable for policy and program implementation through independent evaluations and recommendations.

SUGGESTED ACTIONS FOR DECISION MAKERS:

- Consider funding and supporting CBOs and/or community members to independently create policy recommendations or evaluation tools and reports to guide city energy justice decisions and outcomes.
- Create an accountability tool/framework to assess policies, plans, and programs through an equity lens with the goal of embedding equity across energy policies and programs.

BUILD INFLUENCE THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS AND COALITIONS

When local governments do not offer formal pathways for CBOs and community members to impact decision-making processes, CBOs can build informal collaborations with other organizations with similar values and goals; CBOs can convene experts, advocates, and other partners to influence change. Coalitions can help advance comprehensive solutions that are grounded in a shared vision to support more equitable clean energy policies and solutions that benefit all residents, especially marginalized communities (Facilitating Power et al. 2018).

SHARE ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCES TO BUILD INFLUENCE

CBOs can collaborate, share expertise, and increase capacity in ways that benefit the interests of and outcomes for marginalized communities. By creating coalitions of organizations working toward common goals, CBOs can support one another and mobilize advocacy around equitable clean energy and address disparities in existing programs and policies, especially at the local level (Leon et al. 2019; González 2017; NAACP 2017). For example, Repower LA—a citywide coalition of CBOs, environmentalists, and small businesses—successfully advocated for the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) to institute an Equity Metric Data Initiative (LAANE 2020). This initiative allows LADWP to track and share how well it is serving customers across programs, jobs, and services in low-income communities across 15 metrics (LAWDP 2021). LADWP publishes semi-annual reports that include targets and data for each metric; it also hosts stakeholder engagement meetings for interested parties to learn more about how it uses equity metrics to evaluate its programs and service (LAWDP 2021).

CBOs can also use targeted, collaborative campaigns that aim to influence policy and program developments. Campaigns can help CBOs work collaboratively by tracking the development of local policies, creating joint petitions, and collaborating on outreach

materials and communication strategies to ensure policies and programs commit to equitable outcomes (Leon et al. 2019).

KEY TAKEAWAY FOR CBOs:

- Use coalitions and campaigns with advocates to influence outcomes when formal pathways are not available.

DELIVER CLEAN ENERGY SERVICES TO MAXIMIZE BENEFITS TO LOCAL COMMUNITIES

CBOs can independently deliver clean energy programs to maximize local community benefits. Through integrated and comprehensive clean energy programs, CBOs can reduce the systemic barriers (e.g., lack of upfront capital) or eligibility issues (e.g., citizenship status or deferrals due to health and safety issues) that often exclude marginalized communities from benefiting from clean energy services. By hiring CBOs to deliver clean energy programs, these programs not only provide services for communities that have experienced historic underinvestment, but also build local resilience by building community wealth through local jobs, improving home health and comfort, reducing energy use, and improving energy affordability (Obias and Yoko-Young 2020).

In addition to CBOs independently designing and developing clean energy programs, policymakers can also contract CBOs to implement and deliver clean energy services on behalf of utilities, local governments, or others. CBOs are well suited to address participation barriers and create effective delivery structures that increase accessibility and creditability, which may increase program participation due to the CBO's established trust with their community (Leon et al. 2019; Yuen et al. 2017).

For example, EcoWorks, a Detroit-based nonprofit, focuses on creating just, equitable, and inclusive solutions to climate change and sustainability challenges. In 2014, it created Eco-D, a collaborative, resident-led program that delivers efficiency upgrades and repairs, home energy assessments, and hands-on energy- and water-smart workshops (EcoWorks 2020). EcoWorks has helped more than 57,000 residents reduce their energy bills by an average of 14% and save more than \$49 million collectively (EcoWorks 2020). The Eco-D program is available to residents and neighborhoods, with the goal of developing solutions to increase utility affordability, housing security, and climate resilience (EcoWorks 2020).

In addition, between 2013 and 2014, Verde, a Portland-based CBO, worked with the affordable-housing organization Portland Community Reinvestment Initiatives (PCRI) to offer a weatherization pilot program to 17 affordable housing units (PCRI 2013). With funding from NW Natural, Verde and PCRI engaged with a local minority- and women-owned

business to deliver the weatherization programs as a way to provide an economic opportunity to low-income and communities of color (PCRI 2013). In 2015, Verde expanded this project to weatherize an additional 25 affordable homes (Verde 2021).

KEY TAKEAWAY FOR CBOs:

- Develop and offer energy efficiency programming targeted to the community.
- Hire local contractors to deliver clean energy services to spur economic opportunities.

SUGGESTED ACTIONS FOR DECISION MAKERS:

- Hire CBOs as third-party implementors for energy efficiency programs as a way of directing program funds directly into the community. Decision makers should ensure that the programs offer fair compensation to cover program expenses (e.g., stipends to local partners, marketing partner fees, and community outreach fees).
- Hire CBOs to conduct remediation work and install energy efficiency measures that are not covered through state-funded programs.
- Offer funding to sustain and complete community-led programs to strengthen local clean energy efforts. CBOs can create and implement robust, impactful programs that serve community needs, as well as continue to train their workforce to effectively deliver these programs.

The following box describes a case study of People United for Sustainable Housing (PUSH), Buffalo's grassroots neighborhood program, which offers robust models for CBOs delivering clean energy services. This project shows how CBOs can develop effective programming targeted to the community by directly delivering services to residents and creating economic opportunities—such as green jobs—while achieving positive environmental impacts.

People United for Sustainable Housing (PUSH), Buffalo, NY

Overview

PUSH Buffalo is a CBO based in Buffalo, New York, that seeks to create strong neighborhoods by developing neighborhood leaders, decreasing housing abandonment, and expanding local hiring opportunities (PUSH Buffalo 2021a). It offers several services and resources for community organizing, housing advocacy, clean energy and water investments, and workforce development training. PUSH Buffalo works to deliver triple bottom-line benefits to local neighborhoods: green jobs that pay livable wages, increased home comfort and health, and positive environmental impacts. Its grassroots neighborhood program models demonstrate how a CBO can work with residents, local

contractors, and other partners to reduce the energy costs of residential households and improve tenants' health, comfort, and safety.

PUSH Buffalo's work is made possible through various funding streams, including New York State's Affordable Housing Corporation, which funds programs that address structural issues of the clients they serve while layering in energy efficiency retrofits. PUSH Buffalo also uses braided funds from the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA)'s ratepayer and Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) funds, using the latter for energy efficiency retrofit financing, green job trainings, and supporting a CBO program implementer network.⁷ Local governments can model RGGI as a means to direct funding to CBOs.

Program Description

PUSH Buffalo's PUSH Green program is a community-based energy efficiency program that offers residents free or reduced-cost comprehensive energy assessments, solar installations, and installation services (PUSH Buffalo 2021b). It also offers residential education outreach workshops on energy efficiency, weatherization, and renewable energy to connect residents to programs, knowledge, and resources that can help them access clean energy investments.

Through the PUSH Green program, PUSH Buffalo offers the Warm and Dry program to help residents address structural issues in their homes. Warm and Dry program participants receive a free home assessment that includes health and safety services, such as mold remediation, and energy efficiency installations, such as attic insulation, furnace and water heater replacement, and roof repairs. PUSH Buffalo also hires local contractors who are representative of the communities that the program serves.

Challenges

PUSH Buffalo has addressed challenges to improve outcomes for its programs. For example, it identified language barriers as an issue that prevented some residents from participating in programs. It therefore forged partnerships with local organizations to engage with non-English speakers and create marketing material in multiple languages. PUSH Buffalo also found that sustainable funding was a challenge, as much of the state-

⁷ RGGI is a cap-and-trade carbon pricing program covering northeastern and mid-Atlantic states (Nadel, Gaede, and Haley 2021).

level support varies year to year. While braiding funds from many sources can lead to more robust program outcomes, this can prove challenging when funding sources remain short term. Rebuilding support networks to accommodate short-term funding cycles is challenging, resource intensive, and time consuming.

Outcomes

Since 2012, PUSH Buffalo has delivered energy efficiency retrofit services to more than 700 low-to-moderate income households across Buffalo and Erie County. Of these households, 200 of the completed retrofits included braiding of health and energy efficiency investments. These homes received services for general building conditions, as well as remediated environmental hazards such as lead, mold, and asbestos.

To date, PUSH Buffalo has created 50 living-wage jobs in emerging green sectors and general construction in Buffalo and Erie County.

Advice from PUSH Buffalo

CBOs interested in developing a similar program should contact and engage with local stakeholders and community members. Centering the experience of community members can energize and empower the program to have the greatest impact on the community. Through PUSH Green, PUSH Buffalo found that advocating for community-led programs produces effective home intervention processes and fosters programs that benefit the community.

Sources: C. Gocker Nadel, director of policy and strategy; Lou DeJesus, community energy advisor; and Luz Velez, community resident, PUSH Buffalo, pers. comm., February 10, 2021

DEVELOP COMMUNITY-LED WORKFORCE PROGRAMS AND TRAININGS

While jobs in the clean energy sector can often provide financial stability and pathways for professional careers, these jobs have historically underrepresented women and people of color. Compared to national averages, there are fewer Black or African American workers in

the energy efficiency workforce, slightly fewer Hispanic or Latino workers, and women make up only 25% of the energy efficiency workforce (NASEO and EFI 2020).⁸

Workforce development programs can address inequities in the local clean energy workforce by targeting job opportunities to women, lower-income residents, and other historically excluded groups (Shoemaker, Ayala, and York 2020). Workforce programs led by CBOs are well suited to serve and support historically excluded individuals who may have faced employment barriers, possibly resulting from lack of opportunities to develop soft skills, limited educational attainment, or limited English proficiency. Also, inclusive workforce development programs can address inequities to participation by removing the cost associated with trainings, which can often create a barrier for those unable to pay for training upfront. Local governments can create a robust and diverse clean energy workforce by including diversity and equity in their programs and/or initiatives and by collaborating with CBOs to identify and design clean energy opportunities that meet the needs of community members, with a focus on marginalized communities (Shoemaker and Ribeiro 2018).

CBOs can administer workforce programs independently or collaborate with local governments, community colleges, or trade associations. CBOs are often well suited to increase participation from underrepresented and historically excluded workers, while also helping them build the necessary skills to succeed in the clean energy field (Muro et al. 2019). For example, the Rising Sun Center for Opportunity—a community-based organization serving California’s Bay Area and San Joaquin County—offers workforce development programs that equip young adults, women, and previously incarcerated individuals with skills to obtain careers with wages that can support families in the union construction trades and energy efficiency industry (Rising Sun 2021b.). Since 2000, Rising Sun has offered its Climate Careers youth empowerment program, which employs youth (ages 15–24) to provide energy efficiency services to area residences (Rising Sun 2021a). Participants from the program benefit from paid hands-on experience and training on home weatherization in their local community. In 2020, all youth participating in Climate Careers came from low-income households and more than 80% of those participants reported an increase in skill development and gained expertise in environmental knowledge (Rising Sun

⁸ According to NASEO and EFI’s *2019 Energy and Employment Report*, the proportion of Black or African American individuals in the energy efficiency workforce was four points below the national average, while Hispanic or Latino individuals were three points below the national average (NASEO and EFI 2020).

2020). That same year, participants distributed more than 2,000 energy efficiency kits to residential homes, which helped 106 homes reduce energy and water use (Rising Sun 2020).

KEY TAKEAWAY FOR CBOs:

- When needed, consider designing and implementing workforce development and training programs that prepare workers to succeed in the local job market with needed hard and soft skills.
- Foster relationships with women- and minority-owned businesses to bolster their connections, expertise, and ability to obtain contracts to implement workforce programs.

SUGGESTED ACTIONS FOR DECISION MAKERS:

- Hire CBOs to implement workforce programs. CBOs that have strong relationships in communities increase the likelihood that community members will participate in workforce programs.
- Offer funds for job training in local communities. To advance equitable outcomes, clean energy jobs investments should build wealth in local communities. One way to do this is through local and equitable employment.
- Develop workforce initiatives to streamline resources for minority- and women-owned businesses when needed; such resources might include procurement goals and access to new technologies or capital. Initiatives also can work to establish career pathways with livable wages for workers.

The boxes below offer two case studies—Isles, Inc. and Kinetic Communities Consulting (KC3)—to illustrate community-led workforce developments in action. Both of these workforce development programs exemplify how CBOs are bolstering the local clean energy workforce through trainings, outreach, and partnerships. Isles’s program demonstrates how training local residents can increase participation of community members in target programming. Kinetic Communities Consulting’s efforts highlight mechanisms to elevate women- and minority-owned business success in the clean energy workforce.

Isles, Inc.’s Center for Energy and Environmental Training (CEET)

Overview

Founded in 1981, Isles, Inc. is a nonprofit community development and environmental organization that designs and develops solutions to foster self-reliant, healthy, and sustainable communities (Isles 2019b). Isles offers green job training for youth, while also empowering residents to take control of their financial future, collaborating with residents

to center community-driven development solutions to revitalize communities and promoting healthy living through clean energy pilot projects. Based in Trenton, New Jersey, Isles serves households across the state. Isles encourages partnerships with other CBOs—such as The Children’s Home Society and Trenton Health Team—that have built trust with specific targeted groups to advance their mission and serve households with health and housing programs and benefits.

Isles receives funding to support its workforce programs from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), New Jersey’s Department of Community Affairs, local government funding, and private donations.

Program Description

In 2009, Isles launched the Center for Energy and Environmental Training (CEET), its first workforce development program. CEET offers energy efficiency training that includes both in-class learning, laboratory sessions, and in-the-field experience (Isles 2019a). When funding is available, the program includes training on key soft skills—such as those related to customer service, conflict resolution, and time management—to help program participants succeed in the clean energy workforce. As a Building Performance Institute training and testing center, participants can also take courses on topics such as air-conditioning and heat pumps, multifamily auditing, and industry-driven certifications. The program targets unemployed or underemployed residents or those interested in energy efficiency and helps them develop the skills and obtain the certifications required to excel in the energy efficiency industry.

Isles strives to foster job opportunities for people it has trained and certified through its workforce development programs. Isles often hires trainees from CEET to implement its low-income weatherization program and Trenton-based Lead and Healthy Homes program. CEET-trained contractors have also proven helpful in recruiting households in need of lead abatement and healthy home services, helping Isles to contact and enroll households that its programs had not previously reached.

Challenges

Isles has worked to address challenges faced by CEET program implementers and participants. For example, Isles found that some program participants faced barriers to attending the program because they lacked a driver’s license or access to reliable transportation. This impacted participants ability to attend trainings and succeed in job placements. To combat this barrier, Isles received a private donation that allowed it to partner with a local organization that offered a driver’s license relief program that helped individuals navigate obstacles, such as unpaid traffic tickets, to obtaining a valid driver’s

license. This helped participants address barriers to transportation access and succeed in both the CEET program and in job placements after program completion.

Outcomes

Throughout the years, many participants in Isles' programs have obtained skills and certifications that have allowed them to succeed in the clean energy industry.

Advice from Isles, Inc.

The CEET program creates pathways for local wealth building while providing services for healthy and efficient homes. Isles recommends that CBOs seeking to implement workforce development programs foster relationships with local organizations with similar missions to outreach and identify clients that could benefit from participating in a workforce development program.. Isles also solicited input from employers, such as utilities, who were likely to hire trainees from their CEET program to provide guidance on the skills that workers would need to be successful in their employment. This allowed Isles to adjust the program to ensure that its trainees had the skills needed to succeed in the local job market.

Source: A. Thomas, training manager, Isles Inc., pers. comm., January 6, 2021

Kinetic Communities Consulting (KC3)'s Electrify Staten Island (ElectrifySI) program

Overview

Kinetic Communities Consulting (KC3) is a certified minority-owned and women-led organization located in Brooklyn, New York. KC3 works to increase and expand energy efficiency investments in underrepresented communities and help decision makers use energy efficiency as a mechanism to preserve and restore housing through community development programming, advocacy, and strategic data analysis (KC3 2021). To realize its mission, KC3 works with various housing and workforce development organizations, technical partners, and financial partners.

KC3's work is funded by city and state grants that allow for flexibility and creativity to produce clean energy efforts that align with the current market needs. However, since KC3 operates as a benefit corporation—that is, it is a for-profit small business—it heavily relies on loans from Community Development Finance Institutions (CDFIs) in New York City to operate within the first three months of its projects.

Project Description

In 2018, KC3 developed a pilot program called Electrify Staten Island (ElectrifySI) in collaboration with the New York City's Mayor Office of Sustainability, Neighborhood Housing Services of Staten Island, and Run and Tell That LLC (M/WBE). The program seeks to empower existing small heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning (HVAC) businesses that are women- and minority-owned and operating in Staten Island communities to enable them to provide electrification services to help meet New York State's electrification requirements. (City of New York 2021). Although ElectrifySI prioritizes marginalized communities in Staten Island, its services are available to all homeowners across the city.

In early stages, the project team launched focus groups of Staten Island homeowners to better understand their concerns around electrification efforts as well as the design and implementation of the pilot program. From the focus group, the project team learned that homeowners are interested in receiving guidance on new technology, and that contractors found the clean energy industry difficult to navigate. KC3 also partnered with nonprofit organizations in Staten Island to connect and build relationships with local minority and women HVAC contractors. These nonprofit organizations provide small business service support, such as accounting guidelines, free legal aid, and other business services that enable contractors with excellent business operational skills to create appropriate contracts. The project team provided these nonprofits with educational workshops on the basics of energy efficiency (e.g., what a kilowatt is and where energy comes from), New York's statewide and citywide clean energy policies, and emerging energy-efficient technologies. Through these partnerships, KC3 hopes to help women and minority HVAC contractors obtain training services to build operational capacity and provide the contractors with resources to get free or low-cost training on how to operate and install new air source heat pumps, which will help support the state and city's electrification goals.

In the next phase, the project team aims to continue its outreach to homeowners and begin to connect HVAC contractors to small service programs that will certify them as minority- and women-owned businesses. This is vital for contractors because New York City has government contracts that are specifically designated for certified minority- and women-owned business enterprises. KC3 is negotiating with heat pump manufacturers to offer free training to contractors who are not certified by these manufacturers so that these partnerships can continue servicing marginalized communities after the pilot program ends.

Challenges

While the program is currently in its implementation phase, KC3 has worked through challenges such as achieving ambitious deliverables with limited staff capacity and project funding. KC3 noted that program implementers and funders typically hire organizations to implement programs that have received past contracts, which puts CBOs with limited past experience in implementing clean energy contracts at a disadvantage. Funding to successfully implement clean energy programs can be insufficient to equitably compensate CBOs for the effort needed, and, as KC3 noted, smaller organizations often have higher overhead and other costs compared to large corporations. KC3 expressed that funders often hire agencies, consulting firms, or nonprofit organizations that are well known in the industry and have lower costs for implementation but that lack ties to the target community. These choices can undervalue the expertise and experience of local women and minority business enterprises and CBOs that are well suited to address equity issues in terms of program design, delivery, and recruitment.

Advice from KC3

ElectrifySI aims to empower minority- and women-owned HVAC businesses that operate in Staten Island communities. KC3 recommends that CBOs interested in pursuing a similar effort research existing programs that support economic development and have a strong local interest that benefits the community they serve. Also, CBOs should collect and utilize data to design targeted programs for marginalized communities and to inform energy efficiency recommendations. Lastly, KC3 suggests that CBOs advocate to modify existing programs that uphold systemic inequities, and work to ensure that community members are empowered to lead new initiatives.

Source: D. R. Sanchez, executive director, Kinetic Communities Consulting, pers. comm., January 7, 2021

BUILD LONGSTANDING CAPACITY IN COMMUNITIES FOR LOCALLY LED CLEAN ENERGY EFFORTS

CBOs can strengthen the leadership and skill sets of residents and partner organizations by providing training, education, and skill-building resources. By empowering resident to bring about change in their local communities, CBOs can address transgenerational, structural, and distributional equity dimensions. By building community organizing capacity, CBOs can invest in, strengthen, and support leaders who are working to advance equitable clean energy outcomes while mitigating local climate change impacts for future generations. CBOs can also develop the organizing skills and clean energy expertise of local activists to help

them enact change in their local communities (González 2017; NAACP 2017; Facilitating Power et al. 2018). Through training programs, local activities can build campaigns against harmful practices that further deepen structural inequities and design solutions that hold key stakeholders accountable for centering equity (González 2017).

There are several examples of CBOs that offer training opportunities to build local expertise and organize leadership around clean energy policies and programs. For example, the Partnership for Southern Equity (PSE)'s Just Energy Circle is a coalition that works to advance energy equity by curating a network of CBOs, subject-matter experts, faith leaders, youth movements, advocates, and academics (PSE 2021a). The voice of community residents in the Just Energy Circle is informed by the Just Energy Academy, PSE's energy equity leadership program. This academy is a seven-month leadership development program created to educate and activate a new base of local leaders ready to advocate for energy equity and climate justice in their communities (PSE 2021b). The Just Energy Academy and similar community empowerment programs train community members to become advocates for policies to move toward a more equitable clean energy system.

KEY TAKEAWAY FOR CBOs:

- Build the organizing capacity of local leaders so that they have the expertise and skills needed to enact local change on clean energy and climate issues.
- Strengthen the leaderships skills of residents and thereby empower them to advocate for energy equity and work toward addressing inequities in policies and programs.

SUGGESTED ACTIONS FOR DECISION MAKERS:

- Offer resources to CBOs to help build their capacity. Examples of such resources might include presentations from local governments on clean energy or utilities working to make regulatory processes more accessible.

The box below describes Catalyst Miami's Community Leadership on the Environment, Advocacy, Resilience Program (CLEAR) to highlight how CBOs can empower residents to become leaders, educators, and advocates in their communities. This example shows how CBOs can build community resilience leadership training programs that create a groundswell of grassroots leaders who can effectively advocate for policies and programs that strengthen their communities' resilience and deepen collective understanding of the relationship between climate change and environmental justice.

Catalyst Miami's Community Leadership on the Environment, Advocacy, and Resilience (CLEAR) Program

Overview

Catalyst Miami is a community-based, nonprofit economic justice organization that advances systems-level change through grassroots leadership, policy advocacy, wealth-building, and community economic development. The team provides services, manages programs, and leads initiatives that promote racial equity, social and economic mobility, and community-level resilience. This focus on collective solutions seeks to address issues adversely affecting low-income communities throughout Miami-Dade County.

Catalyst Miami offers direct services free of charge, such as financial coaching, healthcare access support, leadership trainings, and enrollment support for benefits that promote financial health and create opportunities for residents. It offers programs that build local health, wealth, and civic engagement while advocating for people-centered, systemic change (Catalyst Miami 2020). Catalyst Miami works in coalitions, networks, and with many local partners to create just and equitable communities where all residents can thrive. Partners include the Miami Climate Alliance, Florida Rising, Family Action Network Movement, Florida Immigrant Coalition, Florida Conservation Voters, Miami-Dade County, and the City of Miami.

Catalyst Miami receives funding from multiple local and private sources. Most of its climate justice work is funded through foundations, including the Energy Foundation, Miami Foundation, and Kresge Foundation—with the Kresge Foundation awarding Catalyst Miami the initial funds to launch the CLEAR Program.

Program Description

In 2016, Catalyst Miami launched CLEAR to support local neighborhood leaders in low-wealth communities seeking to strengthen local advocacy and increase climate resilience. The CLEAR Program helps Catalyst Miami advance its goal of building and training local leaders to become effective climate resilience educators, organizers, advocates, and innovators (Adefris 2020). The team recognizes that communities of color and low-wealth communities bear the brunt of climate change—including the impacts of rising sea levels and increasing temperatures—yet may also be poised to reap the greatest transformative benefits from local climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts. The program provides training on climate science, climate vulnerability, and climate resilience, and uplifts the perspectives of low-wealth communities to ensure that their experiences and

historically excluded voices are meaningfully understood and acted upon. Through its intersectional and action-oriented structure, CLEAR aims to dismantle barriers, such as economic injustice, lack of affordable housing, lack of information access due to language and broadband limitations, that uphold systems that exacerbate poverty and discrimination among low-wealth communities, which make them most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change (Adefris 2020).

As of December 2020, the CLEAR Program has facilitated 13 cohorts with more than 375 graduates. Each cohort meets weekly for a three-hour session over 10 weeks. Catalyst Miami currently offers the CLEAR program for community members across Miami-Dade County. The CLEAR Program offers participants food, childcare, and interpreters. In addition to curriculum-based training, participants identify an issue in their community and are supported in creating a project proposal that includes a budget and community partners. At the end of the program, Catalyst Miami offers mini grants to participants who are interested in implementing their proposed plans in their communities.

Challenges

Over the years, the CLEAR Program has adapted and changed to meet the needs of participants. Catalyst Miami found that its neighborhood-based model required both honest intentions and time to build trust in communities in which it historically had a weaker organizing presence.⁹ For example, in 2019, Catalyst Miami sought to expand its program to connect with community members in Overtown, one of the most marginalized neighborhoods in Miami-Dade County and one in which Catalyst had been less involved historically. Prior to launching a program there, members of the Catalyst Miami team spent two years building relationships and meaningful trust by attending neighborhood meetings with residents.

The team also works to ensure that its program curriculum and resources reflect the priorities of the residents in each community. Prior to launching CLEAR, Catalyst Miami conducted workshops in each neighborhood to assess the communities' priorities around

⁹ In 2018, Catalyst Miami launched a neighborhood-based resilience hub initiative to target the following communities: Homestead/South Dade, Overtown, Northeast Corridor, Miami Gardens, and Hialeah. The initiative was created to build the neighborhood's infrastructure, build the resilience of low-wealth individuals/families, improve climate-related resilience individuals/families, and build community leadership at the local and state level (Catalyst Miami 2021).

climate resilience and other needs. It found that, in some communities, residents did not rank climate change as a high priority, ranking housing and transportation as more important. This helped Catalyst design the program so that the training sessions met the interests and needs of community members in ways that highlighted the intersection of climate change with other important community priorities.

Outcomes

One of the goals of CLEAR is to create a critical mass of neighborhood leaders with the capacity to address, educate, and speak confidently about climate injustices in Miami-Dade County. Overall, graduates of CLEAR experience a 67%, 81%, and 92% increase in their confidence in speaking about climate change to their families, neighbors, and government, respectively, in comparison to before they participated in the CLEAR program. Furthermore, more than one in five CLEAR graduates were first-time leaders on a social justice action or initiative upon completion of the program.

Since the Neighbors to Leaders fellowship program launched in 2017, it has awarded 15 mini grants to support the neighborhood initiatives of CLEAR graduates. In 2019, for example, a CLEAR program graduate created a three-part workshop to teach 150 high school students about disaster preparedness and resilience (Catalyst Miami 2021). The workshop exposed students to first-hand learning opportunities, such as engaging with a local meteorologist and an American Red Cross staff member, and all students were provided with emergency kits. Students participated in educational activities about disaster preparedness, then analyzed their communities to determine ways in which they were (or were not) climate resilient. These graduate stories contribute to increasing awareness and equitable climate action in Miami-Dade County.

Advice from Catalyst Miami

CBOs interested in developing a program like CLEAR can use Catalyst Miami's CLEAR Program Toolkit as a resource to learn more about the program's strategies, successes, and lessons learned.¹⁰ CBOs may also start by conducting outreach with their community to develop a deeper appreciation for local priorities and create appropriate program curricula. Catalyst Miami found that developing a curriculum around the most pressing

¹⁰ To learn more about the CLEAR Program, visit Catalyst Miami's [CLEAR Toolkit](#).

issues for participants (e.g., gentrification, racial justice, and housing), while also connecting those issues to climate change and clean energy, proved especially effective.

Source: M. Cruz, climate resilient program manager, Catalyst Miami, pers. comm., December 8, 2021

Benefits of Partnership: Suggested Actions for CBOs and Cities

Cities have room for growth in advancing equitable approaches and outcomes in their clean energy efforts. Such progress is not possible, however, without meaningful connections to historically marginalized and underserved communities. CBOs can play a critical role in facilitating equitable clean energy progress. The case studies highlighted in this report demonstrate strategies that CBOs can follow to embrace opportunities to advance energy equity in their communities and drive change.

Decision makers who want to achieve equitable clean energy outcomes can explore the opportunities outlined in each strategy, which will support and amplify community-led clean energy efforts within their communities. By doing so, decision makers can work to address inequities in clean energy policy and program development, implementation, and evaluation processes, while making room for CBOs to help define and drive clean energy outcomes. For example, decision makers can ensure that CBOs hold leadership roles in the planning, design, and implementation of clean energy programs and policies to achieve more equitable outcomes for their constituents while also building community trust.

ACTIONS FOR COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Following is a summary of actions for advancing energy equity that emerged from our study of CBOs:

- Participate in formal policy processes.
 - Provide direct feedback and support through stakeholder engagement processes.
 - Fill formal decision-making roles in established committees, boards, and advisory councils.
- Develop accountability frameworks and direct oversight.
 - Provide accountability and oversight for policy decisions and program designs.
- Build influence through partnerships and coalitions.

- Share organizational resources to build influence.
- Deliver clean energy services to maximize benefits to local communities.
- Develop community-led workforce programs and trainings.
- Build longstanding capacity in communities for locally led clean energy efforts.

ACTIONS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Following are recommendations for local decision makers who want to support CBOs to advance equitable clean energy outcomes. These recommendations emerged from conversations with CBOs about how local governments can best support community-based efforts.

- Build trust with CBOs by sustaining community engagement processes from the beginning to the end of the development and implementation of policies and programs.
- Ensure that engagement processes are less cumbersome for participants and offer financial and other support—such as childcare, transportation, and meals—to help CBOs navigate engagement processes.
- Entrust decision-making power to community-led representative advisory boards to define and drive policies and program design, implementation, and outcomes, with accountability measures baked in.
- Embed accountability into decision-making processes through accountability tools and frameworks that are transparent, inclusive, and consistently used to evaluate the progress of policies and programs.
- Offer funding for job training in local communities to build wealth in local communities.
- Hire CBOs with strong relationships in communities to implement energy efficiency and renewable energy workforce development programs.
- Fund and support CBOs and/or community members to independently create policy recommendations or evaluations to guide city energy justice decisions and outcomes.
- Develop workforce initiatives to streamline resources to minority- and women-owned businesses when needed; such resources might include procurement goals and access to new technologies or capital. Initiatives also can work to establish career pathways and livable wages for workers.

- Create pathways for funding over multiple years to support community-led programs so that they have long-term resources to create and complete robust, impactful programs that serve community needs.
- Build CBO capacity through additional resources, such as grants to support training and projects, resources to facilitate engagement and involvement in policymaking and program design, and additional funding opportunities to support community-led clean energy work.

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Appendix

Table A1. Community-based organizations (CBOs) working to advance equitable clean energy policies, programs, and outcomes in their local communities (arranged in alphabetical order based on state and city)

Organization name	City, state	Example strategy*	Organization's mission	Website
Native Renewables	Flagstaff, AZ	Deliver clean energy services to maximize benefits to local communities	Native Renewables is building and expanding renewable energy capacity to homes on the Navajo Reservation. It strives to empower Native Americans to achieve energy independence and increase energy affordability.	nativerenewables.org
Wildfire	Phoenix, AZ	Build influence through partnerships and coalitions	Wildfire strives to alleviate the effects of poverty by advocating for fair practices, collaborating on policy issues, and supporting community action initiatives.	wildfireaz.org
Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE)	Los Angeles, CA	Build influence through partnerships and coalitions	Grounded in grassroots organizing and community-oriented policy, LAANE hopes to build a new economy rooted in good jobs, thriving communities, and a healthy environment.	laane.org

Organization name	City, state	Example strategy*	Organization's mission	Website
Environmental Health Coalition (EHC)	National City, CA	Develop accountability frameworks and direct oversight	Through community organizing, policy advocacy, and leader empowerment, EHC is dedicated to achieving environmental and social justice.	environmentalhealth.org
Rising Sun Center for Opportunity	Oakland, CA	Develop community-led workforce programs and trainings	Rising Sun works at the intersection of economic equity and climate resilience with a mission to build career pathways for Bay Area residents.	risingsunopp.org
People Organizing to Demand Environmental and Economic Justice (PODER)	San Francisco, CA	Build influence through partnerships and coalitions	PODER is a grassroots organization that works to create models of economic resiliency and environmental sustainability to address inequities faced by low-income Latino immigrants and other communities of color in San Francisco.	podersf.org

Organization name	City, state	Example strategy*	Organization’s mission	Website
Groundswell	Washington, DC	Deliver clean energy services to maximize benefits to local communities	Through equitable community solar projects, clean energy programs, and pioneering research initiatives, Groundswell builds community power to ensure energy affordability.	groundswell.org
Catalyst Miami	Miami, FL	Build longstanding capacity in community for locally led clean energy efforts	Catalyst Miami works to identify and collectively solve issues adversely affecting low-wealth communities throughout Miami-Dade County. Through its variety of services, programs, initiatives, and networks, the organization intentionally advances grassroots leadership, policy advocacy, wealth-building, and community economic development.	catalystmiami.org

Organization name	City, state	Example strategy*	Organization’s mission	Website
Partnership for Southern Equity (PSE)	Atlanta, GA	Build longstanding capacity in community for locally led clean energy efforts	PSE works to advance policies and institutional actions that promote racial equity and prosperity for all in the growth of metropolitan Atlanta and the American South.	psequity.org
Alliance for Affordable Energy	New Orleans, LA	Develop accountability frameworks and direct oversight	As a consumer and public health advocacy organization, Alliance for Affordable Energy works at the nexus of social justice, sustainable economic development, and environment protection. The Alliance works to protect consumers’ right to an affordable, equitable, and environmentally responsible energy system.	all4energy.org

Organization name	City, state	Example strategy*	Organization's mission	Website
Alternative for Community and Environment (ACE)	Boston, MA	Build influence through partnerships and coalitions	ACE empowers communities of color and low-income communities to address environmental racism and classism. It hopes to create health and sustainable communities, and to achieve environmental justice.	ace-ej.org
Green Roots	Chelsea, MA	Participate in formal policy processes	Green Roots is dedicated to improving and enhancing the urban environment and public health of Chelsea. It works to achieve this through community engagement and empowerment, youth leadership, and implementation of projects and campaigns.	greenrootschelsea.org

Organization name	City, state	Example strategy*	Organization’s mission	Website
<p>Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice (DWEJ)</p>	<p>Detroit, MI</p>	<p>Develop accountability frameworks and direct oversight</p>	<p>Education, training, advocacy, and policy are the pillars of DWEJ’s work. Through these channels, it helps underrepresented populations in Detroit gain access to resources and knowledge for creating long-term healthy solutions.</p>	<p>detroitenvironmentaljustice.org</p>
<p>EcoWorks</p>	<p>Detroit, MI</p>	<p>Deliver clean energy services to maximize benefits to local communities</p>	<p>EcoWorks works at the intersection of community development and sustainability. Its goal is to create just, equitable, and inclusive solutions to climate change and other community sustainability challenges.</p>	<p>ecoworksdetroit.org</p>

Organization name	City, state	Example strategy*	Organization’s mission	Website
Soulardarity	Highland Park, MI	Build longstanding capacity in community for locally led clean energy efforts	Through community organizing, education, and people-powered clean energy, Soulardarity is building a brighter future for residents in Highland Park. The organization is working to install solar-powered streetlights, help residents save money on energy bills, and create a just and equitable energy system for all.	soulardarity.com
Center for Earth, Energy, and Democracy (CEED)	Minneapolis, MN	Participate in formal policy processes	CEED works in collaboration with grassroots communities, policymakers, and researchers to ensure that communities and policymakers have the tools and information they need to create just, sustainable energy and environmental policy	ceed.org

Organization name	City, state	Example strategy*	Organization’s mission	Website
Appalachian Voices	Boone, NC	Build influence through partnerships and coalitions	Appalachian Voices is determined to advance a just transition to a generative and equitable clean energy economy. It strives to build healthy ecosystems and resilient local economies that allow communities to foster local prosperity.	appvoices.org
Isles, Inc.	Trenton, NJ	Develop community-led workforce programs and trainings	Isles aims to foster self-reliant families and healthy, sustainable communities. Isles offers diverse tools and services to train and educate residents for environmental careers, to revitalize communities, and to promote healthy living and build residents’ wealth through financial services and trainings.	isles.org

Organization name	City, state	Example strategy*	Organization's mission	Website
Kinetic Communities Consulting (KC3)	Brooklyn, NY	Develop community-led workforce programs and trainings	As a minority, women-owned business enterprise, KC3 collaboratively works with energy and affordable housing partners to connect, educate, and simplify energy efficiency opportunities for underserved communities in New York.	kineticcommunities.consulting
Neighborhood Housing Services (NHS) of Staten Island	Staten Island, NY	Deliver clean energy services to maximize benefits to local communities	NHS of Staten Island works to create and maintain sustainable homes and communities. Through its programming, NHS hopes to achieve homes and communities that are affordable and well designed to support the health, safety, and economic stability of residents.	nhsofsi.org
Northwest Bronx Community Clergy Coalition (NWBCCC)	Bronx, NY	Deliver clean energy services to maximize benefits to local communities	NWBCCC convenes people with diverse backgrounds and various institutions to achieve racial and economic justice through community organizing.	northwestbronx.org

Organization name	City, state	Example strategy*	Organization's mission	Website
People for United Sustainable Housing (PUSH) Buffalo	Buffalo, NY	Deliver clean energy services to maximize benefits to local communities	PUSH Buffalo strives to mobilize residents to fight for quality, affordable housing, expand local hiring opportunities, and advance economic and environmental justice in Buffalo.	pushbuffalo.org
Uprose	Brooklyn, NY	Build longstanding capacity in community for locally led clean energy efforts	Uprose promotes sustainability and resilience through community organizing, education, indigenous and youth leadership development, and cultural/artistic expression.	uprose.org
We ACT for Environmental Justice	New York City, NY	Build influence through partnerships and coalitions	We ACT promotes healthy communities by involving people of color and/or low-income residents to participate in the creation of just and fair environmental health and protection policies and practices.	weact.org

Organization name	City, state	Example strategy*	Organization's mission	Website
Cleveland Neighborhood Progress	Cleveland, OH	Build influence through partnerships and coalitions	Cleveland Neighborhood Progress is a local community development funding intermediary working to foster inclusive communities and create opportunities throughout the City of Cleveland.	clevelandnp.org
Verde	Portland, OR	Participate in formal policy processes	Verde serves its community through outreach and advocacy, and social enterprise. It has involved community members in the planning and building of environmental investments and ensured that low-income people and people of color directly benefit from these investments.	verdenw.org
green spaces	Chattanooga, TN	Develop community-led workforce programs and trainings	green spaces works to improve Chattanooga's environment, economy, and social equity by promoting sustainability in the way residents live, work, and build.	greenspaceschattanooga.org

Organization name	City, state	Example strategy*	Organization's mission	Website
Green Career Dallas	Dallas, TX	Develop community-led workforce programs and trainings	Through green career training and community education, Green Career Dallas aims to empower and energize residents of South Dallas by creating innovative economic opportunities in underserved neighborhoods.	greencareersdallas.org
Southwest Workers Union (SWU)	San Antonio, TX	Build longstanding capacity in community for locally led clean energy efforts	SWU aims to build a strong, resilient base of workers by reframing public policy and increasing community-led structures of education and the economy.	swunion.org
Front and Centered	Seattle, WA	Build influence through partnerships and coalitions	Front and Centered is working to create a just economic transition in which communities are self-sufficient. It works to ensure that people of color and indigenous people are at the center of building equitable, democratic systems and policies that benefit their communities.	frontandcentered.org

Organization name	City, state	Example strategy*	Organization's mission	Website
Got Green	Seattle, WA	Participate in formal policy processes	Got Green organizes for environmental, racial, and economic justice by empowering multigenerational leaders. In doing so, it works to ensure that the benefits of a green economy and green movement reach low-income communities and communities of color.	gotgreenseattle.org
Puget Sound Sage	Seattle, WA	Participate in formal policy processes	Puget Sound Sage builds community power to influence, lead, and govern in the South Salish Sea and Duwamish River Valley regions.	pugetsoundsage.org

* While we highlight one strategy in this table, many of these organizations employ more than one of the six strategies outlined in this report.