



RENEWABLE
THERMAL
COLLABORATIVE

Community Benefits Handbook

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Foreword

As we confront the urgency of the climate crisis and its disproportionate impact on vulnerable communities, it is crucial to understand how we got here. The unsustainable use of natural resources, coupled with the practice of burning fossil fuels and ignoring the health of vulnerable communities, has driven pollution and waste to unsustainable levels.¹ The legacy of prioritizing business progress over people and planet has left deep mistrust and division between private institutions, governmental organizations, and vulnerable communities. Even companies with ambitious climate commitments and strong sustainability goals find themselves challenged by their perceived inability to connect their practices to the well-being of communities. Recent studies have shown that local community opposition is the leading cause of sustainable infrastructure delay or cancellation,² resulting in the loss of millions of dollars.³

There is a path forward. This handbook is designed to help Renewable Thermal Collaborative (RTC) Members navigate the essential steps of partnering with community stakeholders and leveraging sustainability goals to deliver tangible, equity-based benefits to their local communities. The handbook breaks down key terms and concepts to build a foundational understanding of community benefits, while also outlining the critical processes, insights, best practices, and models needed to effectively design and implement these initiatives. No matter your starting point, this handbook will serve as a practical, go-to guide to help you develop community partnerships that are fruitful for all stakeholders.

As you prepare for new types of engagement with your local communities, try not to feel anxious! Community stakeholders are not obstacles to success. Think of them instead as essential partners who can pave the way for success. Studies have shown that engaging communities early and often increases the success rate of sustainable development projects.⁴ This guide will equip you with the tools to build those essential partnerships and move forward with confidence.

1 Am J Public Health. 2011 Dec;101(Suppl 1): S37–S52. doi: [10.2105/AJPH.2011.300183](https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2011.300183)
2 Energy Policy. 2022 Jun; 165. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2022.112922>
3 Berkeley Lab. 2024 Jan. Survey of Utility-Scale Wind and Solar Developers Report. <https://energyanalysis.lbl.gov/publications/survey-utility-scale-wind-and-solar>
4 Berkeley Lab. 2024 Jan. Survey of Utility-Scale Wind and Solar Developers Report. <https://energyanalysis.lbl.gov/publications/survey-utility-scale-wind-and-solar>



Glossary of Key Terms

Community: A community is a collective of individuals who share a common identity, which can be based on factors such as geographic location, cultural or ethnic background, socioeconomic experience, shared interests and values, and more. Communities exist on different scales, from larger groups (e.g., a city, nation, or broad cultural group) to smaller groups (e.g., individuals with a similar lived experience). A community is made up of diverse stakeholders, such as residents, grassroots activists, local businesses, nonprofits, educators, civic leaders, and others, who each play a role in contributing to the overall well-being, development, and cohesion of the group.

Community Benefits: Benefits that improve the quality of life for a community in a tangible and measurable way within a discrete time period. Also referred to as direct benefits. The benefits reflect community priorities for addressing barriers the community has identified. This contrasts with indirect benefits, which do not address root causes or change material conditions for individuals and are difficult to assess or measure. A direct benefit from a project could include job creation or the transfer of assets, such as solar panels, to a priority community. In this instance, there are no degrees of separation between the priority population and the directly delivered benefits.

Community Benefits Agreement (CBA): A community benefits agreement is a voluntary but legally binding agreement between a developer or company and nearby community organizations that directs benefits from new development projects to local people. These benefits vary based on a community's needs; they can include employment provisions, new infrastructure, and resources for the community such as affordable housing, public parks, job training programs, and/or measures to protect the environment.

Community Benefits Plan (CBP): A community benefits plan is a non-legally binding roadmap for how a developer will engage with communities during a project. While they do not always include designated funding or enforcement mechanisms, CBPs can help pave the way for future, legally binding community benefits agreements by laying some of the groundwork and bringing stakeholders together early on.



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Executive Summary

This handbook is designed to help Renewable Thermal Collaborative (RTC) Members navigate the essential steps of partnering with community stakeholders and leveraging sustainability goals to deliver tangible, equity-based benefits to their local communities.

Involving community stakeholders in project planning and delivering a fair share of economic, environmental, and social benefits back to the community can de-risk development. Community benefits de-risk development in several ways, including:

- Unlocking financing and buy-in from public entities that is contingent on community engagement and support,
- Proactively addressing community concerns before they lead to permitting or construction delays,
- Leveraging strengths and insights of local partners, and
- Avoid costly missteps such as investing in community impact initiatives that do nothing to further the relationship between company and community

The essential steps to effective community engagement and benefits planning as outlined in this handbook are as follows:

1	2	3	4	5
Ready your organization	Develop an understanding of community context as part of your due diligence	Conduct an environmental health community impact and preliminary needs assessment	Intentionally engage stakeholders	Co-develop community benefits

As you prepare for new types of engagement with your local communities, try not to feel anxious! No matter your starting point, this handbook will serve as a practical, go-to guide to help you develop community partnerships that are fruitful for all stakeholders.



PART I

The Value of a Community-Centered Approach

De-risking Development with Better-Than-Usual Approaches

Building authentic partnerships with communities can significantly reduce project risks and enable the success of renewable thermal development projects. Growing project opposition from communities, due to past harm and a legacy of exploitation, can derail projects and be costly.⁵ Involving community stakeholders in project planning and delivering a fair share of economic, environmental, and social benefits back to the community can de-risk development and realize mutual benefits for project developers and communities. This can be achieved through many paths, including unlocking financing and buy-in from public entities that is contingent on community engagement and support, proactively addressing community concerns before they lead to permitting or construction delays, and making sure the strengths and insights of local partners are not left on the table.

⁵ Berkeley Lab. 2024 Jan. Survey of Utility-Scale Wind and Solar Developers Report. <https://energyanalysis.lbl.gov/publications/survey-utility-scale-wind-and-solar>

Following the community’s lead in defining benefits avoids costly missteps, such as investing in community impact initiatives that do not align with community priorities and do nothing to further the relationship between company and community.

SCENARIO

Company assumes that planting trees in a community to create a buffer between a factory and a residential neighborhood will be a well-received strategy for enhancing local air quality and beautifying the area.

Community Context: No capacity for irrigation and ongoing tree maintenance

WITHOUT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Company invests in tree planting
- Tree leaves fall and clog stormwater infrastructure leading to localized flooding
- Trees become overgrown and many die off, leading to blocked sidewalks and damaged infrastructure from invasive roots
- Community is frustrated with the company and relationship becomes strained
- Company funds are wasted
- Goal of supporting the community and de-risking the project is undermined

WITH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Community shares that they do not have capacity for tree maintenance
- Together, company and community co-create a community benefit approach based on the needs emphasized by the community, including workforce training programs and air quality monitoring infrastructure
- Company invests in co-created benefit, community is supported, and company project proceeds without community opposition
- Company has facilitated future licenses to operate in community

What is community?

The definition of community depends on the specific context. A community can be described as a collective of individuals who share a common identity, which can be based on factors such as geographic location, cultural or ethnic background, socioeconomic experience, shared interests and values, and more. A place-based community is made up of diverse stakeholders, such as workers, residents, grassroots activists, local businesses, nonprofits, educators, elected officials, and others, who each play a role in contributing to the overall well-being, development, and cohesion of the locality.

Instead of attempting to define a single, abstract “community,” focus on identifying the key groups likely to be affected by the project and aim to have the range of perspectives held within each group represented.

There are specific categorizations of communities that are commonly eligible for additional policy or economic development support to overcome challenging circumstances. These include:

- **Energy Communities:** Areas with historically high involvement or impact from the fossil fuel industry
- **Environmental Justice Communities:** A community composed predominantly of people of color or people below the federal poverty line, that is subjected to a disproportionate burden of environmental hazards relative to other communities
- **Disadvantaged Communities (DACs):** Communities that are economically disadvantaged and overburdened by pollution or underinvestment in housing, transportation, water and wastewater infrastructure, and health care
- **Rural Communities:** Communities with fewer than 2,000 housing units and 5,000 residents
- **Tribal Communities:** A group of people who are recognized as Indigenous people under federal law
- **Low Income Communities:** Communities composed primarily of people living below 2X the federal poverty line

As evidenced in the RTC’s J40 Opportunity Assessment, the RTC’s membership has a significant footprint across these categories of communities, with over 73% of RTC Members’ facilities located in at least one of these categories.⁶ When such communities are proximate to existing facilities that will be retrofitted or new sites for renewable thermal projects, there is a particular opportunity to use thoughtful development practices that will protect communities from new adversity and bring equitable benefits into view.

6 RTC Justice40 Opportunity Assessment; <https://www.renewablethermal.org/rtc-justice40-opportunity-assessment/#:~:text=This%20assessment%20illuminated%20the%20opportunity%20for%20the%20RTC,sustainability%20goals%2C%20national%20emissions%20targets%2C%20and%20justice%20objectives.>

An Equitable Energy System...



Institutionalizes accountability for achieving equitable outcomes from government, utilities, and other stakeholders



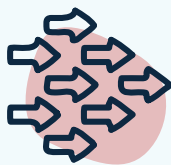
Embeds inclusive, accessible, and authentic community engagement in the development of policies and programs



Recognizes and addresses historical, cultural, and institutional dynamics and structures that created past and current inequities



Ensures representation, power, and influence from community members and/or environmental justice advocates in decision-making and implementation processes



Considers intergenerational impacts and does not create policies or programs that unjustly burden future generations



Achieves a fair distribution of opportunities, benefits, and burdens for all communities

Source: Reproduced from <https://www.aceee.org/topic/energy-equity>

WHAT ARE COMMUNITY BENEFITS?

Community benefits consist of three key parts: **the Community (the Who), the Benefits (the What), and the Benefits Delivery Vehicle (the How)**. Each piece is essential. The Community refers to the stakeholders directly impacted by the lifecycle of a project. The Benefits are the tangible and intangible gains, such as improved infrastructure, health and environmental outcomes, or economic opportunities. Lastly, the Benefits Delivery Vehicle is the process or mechanism used to deliver these benefits, whether through funding, plans, agreements, partnerships, or more.

A sample of community benefits that can be integrated into RTC Members' industrial decarbonization projects are detailed in [Appendix B](#).

WHAT ARE EQUITABLE BENEFITS?

Centering equity involves acknowledging and addressing disparities and systemic barriers to ensure that everyone has a fair chance to succeed and experience positive outcomes, regardless of their background or identity. Equitable benefits ensure:

- All members of the community are involved in the co-creation of the benefits
- Positive outcomes and resources are distributed fairly across every stakeholder group

Avoid these common pitfalls!⁸

PITFALL

Assuming that profit margins or project price is the sole determinant of a project's success, and that effective community engagement will slow down the project.

INSIGHT

Community opposition is a leading reason new development projects are either delayed or cancelled.⁹ Each delay or cancellation could cost businesses millions of dollars. Owners of failed projects state that they wished they had engaged communities proactively to prevent project failure.

ACTION

Engage communities early and often to ensure both community and project success.

8 Common pitfalls described within this Handbook were informed by the Just Transition PowerForce "Equity Pledge & Implementation Guidance for Renewable Energy Developers & Investors" <https://emeraldcities.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/PFEquityPledge.pdf>

9 Berkeley Lab. 2024 Jan. Survey of Utility-Scale Wind and Solar Developers Report. <https://energyanalysis.lbl.gov/publications/survey-utility-scale-wind-and-solar>

PART II

Constructing Engagement Strategies and Planning for Community Benefits

There is no one size fits all solution to community benefits, and the goal is not to arrive at unanimous consensus. Instead, the goal is to ensure that the community is understood, and their participation and insights have been meaningfully represented and incorporated throughout the planning process. As you move through this process, remember that delivering benefits to a community is both a process and outcome.

The following section outlines steps for meaningfully engaging and co-creating a successful community benefits plan.

Ready your organization

Creating a community benefits strategy that aligns with a broad corporate sustainability strategy will be new to most organizations. Those tasked with understanding the opportunity and how to approach benefits planning and resourcing should consider internal capacity, level of buy-in, historical and current reputation with community partners, availability of intermediaries, and the key business drivers. Table 1 contains key considerations as you assemble your team and map an approach.



TABLE 1 | Forming Your Approach and Building Your Team

GETTING READY	CONSIDERATIONS
Assess internal capacity & select the right team for benefits planning	<p>Sustainability, communications, government relations, community affairs, economic affairs, engineering, facility development or other internal functions are reasonable candidates to lead an engagement approach. Commonly, the effort will require a team composed of representatives from several departments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Which team members are excellent communicators and know how to facilitate conversations with diverse stakeholders?■ What individuals or teams already have touchpoints with community stakeholders or experience with community engagement and/or benefits planning?■ Who is physically present and has long-ties to the specific community locale?■ Who makes facility-level decisions about workforce development, trainings, local hiring, and supply chains?■ If buy-in from internal stakeholders is still needed, what collaborators can you engage who are good problem solvers, savvy at change management, and have a good track record at launching new projects or initiatives?■ What training or skill building does the core team need to be effective, especially in showing up effectively for vulnerable community members (for example, an Environmental Justice 101 training)?
Determine which facilities or sites may be a good fit for community benefits	<p>It is best practice to integrate community benefits practices across all your facilities, but an analysis of your portfolio can be used to identify which sites should be first priority. This portfolio scan can be focused on both existing facilities and planned future development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Do any of the facilities have strong pre-existing relationships with the local community?■ Are any of the facilities located in communities that may qualify for additional funding opportunities?<ul style="list-style-type: none">» See the “What is community?” section for community definitions that may qualify for additional benefits» Leverage pre-existing GIS-based mapping tools and/or demographic data to determine if your facilities are located within these communities, such as the EPA EJ Screen Tool, CJEST Tool, or US Census American Community Survey (ACS) data■ Are any of the facilities located in states or municipalities that offer additional incentives for community benefits planning?



Ready your organization

GETTING READY	CONSIDERATIONS
Buy-in from leadership and key departments (finance, legal and compliance)	<p>Embarking upon this process will require personnel time, policy and regulatory compliance, and budget allocations. To line up the approvals and resources for a successful effort, prepare a strong case that connects to business and mission imperatives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ What are the points of alignment between the company’s mission, values, goals, and community engagement and benefits planning? Examples might include:<ul style="list-style-type: none">» Corporate social responsibility» Corporate sustainability» Supplier and workforce diversity» Education, trainings, and workforce development initiatives■ What business imperatives are advanced through strong community support? These might include:<ul style="list-style-type: none">» Access to federal or state funding, or other financial incentives» Compliance with federal and state policies, local ordinances and permitting requirements» Alignment with employee and customer expectations» Progress towards corporate social responsibility goals» Leadership position and advantage over competitors in gaining social license to operate■ What are the risks of inaction, such as NIMBYism (not in my backyard), development delays, reputational harm, or competitive disadvantages?■ What is a small, manageable first initiative to help demonstrate the value of robust community engagement and benefits planning? A first initiative that leverages known collaborators, such as existing partners or employee groups with close community ties, can help set the stage for a broader second effort.
Understand the company’s reputation within community	<p>For companies with existing operations, take stock of your current reputation and level of community engagement. If new to a location, understand that the reputation of other companies may influence how your company is perceived, either positively or negatively.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ How is the company currently perceived by workers and community stakeholders? If there is a strong foundation, look to build upon it. If there are historic challenges, look to address those legacy issues first and with those previously impacted.■ What community initiatives are already in place and working well?■ Can informal partnerships with the community be leveraged or formalized for more in-depth engagement?

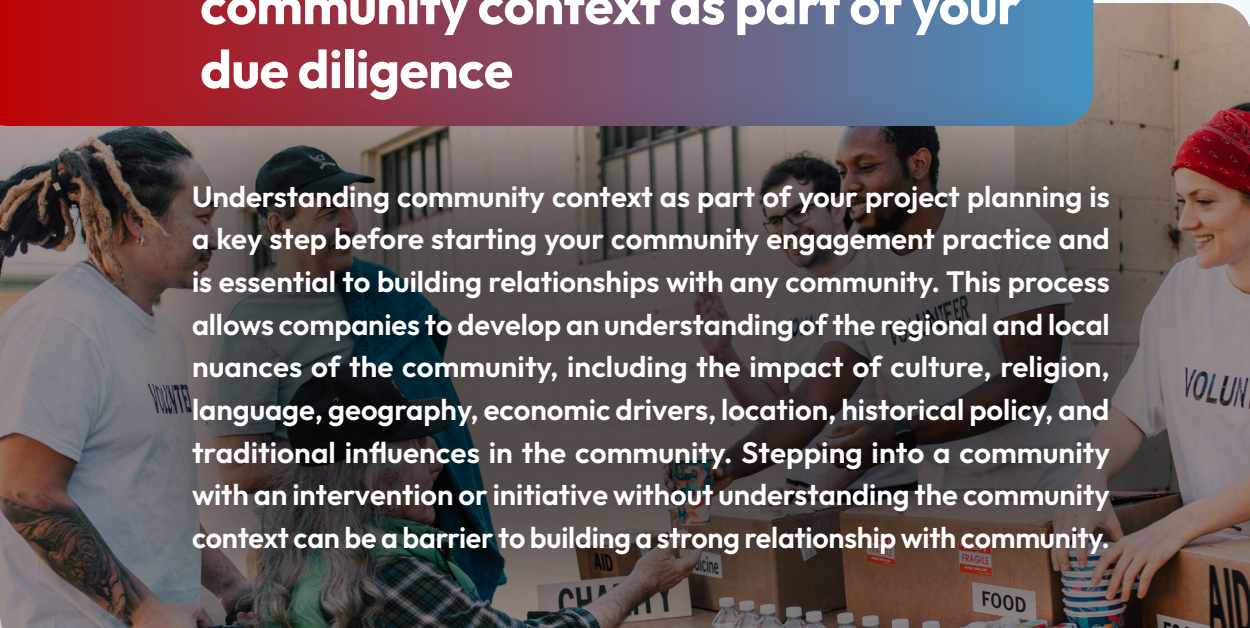
Ready your organization

GETTING READY	CONSIDERATIONS
Bring in intermediaries	<p>Companies may lack internal capacity to manage a high-quality community engagement process. Intermediaries often have dedicated capacity and established expertise in community engagement techniques, can help with plan development, and serve as a bridge between your company and the community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ What capabilities and functions will be most useful to entrust to an intermediary? These might include:<ul style="list-style-type: none">» Performing research and conducting a community needs assessment» Recruiting community organizations into a benefits planning process» Facilitating conversations and public meetings between company representatives, community residents, labor organizations, or government officials» Supporting the development of community benefits plan and agreement documents» Supporting the ongoing implementation and impact evaluation of community benefits plans and agreements■ A list of potential intermediaries is included in the resource library.
Vet potential solutions providers and contractors	<p>Agreed upon community benefits may be delivered by a third-party solution provider or contractor (e.g., local hiring commitments for a facility construction project are fulfilled by the general contractor and sub-contracted companies). An initial due diligence screening can help organizations identify the appropriate collaborators to deliver benefits.</p> <p>Questions to ask include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Are you willing to work with local stakeholders, including labor unions, to prioritize local hiring and support workforce development programs?■ Are you willing to require any subcontractors to align with these same expectations?■ Are you willing to respect the terms of collective bargaining agreements in place?■ Are you willing to prioritize diverse-owned and minority-owned businesses in the supply chain?■ Do you have any public ESG goals?■ Do you have experience with the protection of environmentally and culturally sensitive habitats?■ Are you willing to include community-led metrics and practices to monitor, evaluate, and report results on the delivery of community benefits?



Meaningfully Engage Communities

Develop an understanding of community context as part of your due diligence



Understanding community context as part of your project planning is a key step before starting your community engagement practice and is essential to building relationships with any community. This process allows companies to develop an understanding of the regional and local nuances of the community, including the impact of culture, religion, language, geography, economic drivers, location, historical policy, and traditional influences in the community. Stepping into a community with an intervention or initiative without understanding the community context can be a barrier to building a strong relationship with community.



KEY INSIGHT

Consider Multiple Sources of Information

Community history can be a complex topic. When conducting a review of local histories, it is important to evaluate both the “standard” history—the information that can be found in libraries or newspaper archives—and the less comfortable parts of history such as discrimination or economic domination by a small group.

RTC Members should pursue all potential sources of information to develop a comprehensive understanding of local histories, including the sources noted in Table 2.

Thoroughly reviewing historical and current community context allows RTC Members to:

- Gain a general idea of the community's strengths and the challenges it faces.
- Understand unspoken, influential rules and norms. This will help companies converse intelligently with residents about community issues, and community stakeholders will appreciate efforts to get to know the local context.
- Learn about the community's experience with other companies and developments, including issues with worker safety and working conditions.

Understanding community context and local histories includes recognizing aspects like:

- Physical characteristics including climate, terrain, and available natural resources
- Buildings and infrastructure (e.g., local parks, schools, places of worship and essential businesses)
- Patterns of settlement, commerce, and industry
- Demographics (present and past)
- History with policies, company action, and natural disasters
- Community leaders (formal and informal, present and past)
- Community culture (formal and informal) (e.g., music, food, arts)
- Existing groups, coalitions, institutions, and initiatives
- Economics including income and employment levels and property values
- Government/politics
- Attitudes and values
- Healthcare access, health drivers and outcomes
- Educational access and attainment opportunities and challenges to achieving economic growth and cultural well being

Process





TABLE 2 | Sourcing Information about Community Context

RESOURCE	TYPE OF INFORMATION
Public records and archives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ When the community was founded■ How people lived and worked in the past■ Major sources of employment and conditions for workers■ Property ownership and transfers■ Neighborhood redevelopment plans
Other publicly available data sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Community demographics■ Unemployment rates■ Economic sectors
State and local policy summaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Current policies that impact the community today■ History of policies with lingering legacies
Interviews with activists, journalists, non-profit leaders, and local colleagues and workers and/or community surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Current and historical community struggles■ Conflict in the community■ Past and current community concerns and issues■ Shared points of community pride■ Historic centers of power■ Important points for community gathering (examples include places of worship, community centers)■ Perception of company action in the community■ Past and current relationships among key people and groups■ Aspirations the community has for itself

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS IF YOUR COMPANY IS ESTABLISHED IN THE COMMUNITY:

- Start by connecting with plant managers, worker representatives, and community relations personnel to capture their understanding of the community.
- Identify how the facility has historically engaged with the community, if at all. Are there established community partners?
- Engagement should extend beyond existing relationships to ensure there is no unintentional gap in community understanding.

TOOLS AND RESOURCES

- [Understanding and Describing the Community](#): A detailed guide on how to understand all aspects of a community, and where to find community information if starting from scratch.
- [Asset Mapping Toolkit](#): Workbook on using Participatory Asset Mapping as a tool for identifying community strengths and supporting change initiatives. Contains useful case studies to illustrate community mapping in action.
- [Power Mapping 101](#): A guide on how to conduct a community power mapping exercise.

Avoid these common pitfalls!

PITFALL

Assuming that the project will not affect the community or assuming that development in the area is inherently good.

INSIGHT

Development will inherently alter the structure, character, and memories of the community.

ACTION

Understand the history of the community, and their wants and needs. Be transparent and conscientious about the impacts your development will have.

Conduct an environmental health community impact and preliminary needs assessment

Assessing community health and economic profiles can provide a baseline understanding of how the development might exacerbate or relieve existing burdens, and what benefits may be most relevant. Using public databases, available GIS-datasets, and other research tools in the early stages of engagement planning can inform community conversations, setting the stage for community members to ground truth those assessments, speak to the implications for their day-to-day experiences, and shape project and benefits planning towards the solutions they find meaningful. This due diligence process can be completed by intermediaries, members of the company's core team, or community stakeholders.

KEY INSIGHT

Connect existing community risks and needs to project impacts and opportunities

The value (or harm) that industrial decarbonization projects—whether new developments or retrofits to existing industrial facilities—bring to communities is dependent on the extent to which existing community needs are addressed and new burdens are prevented. Companies can gain fluency in likely areas of concern, particularly for pollution and economic-related burdens, as a helpful precursor to meeting with community stakeholders and shaping benefits plans. Community members living in the area will understand their needs best, but approaching them with preliminary assessments focused on issues of likely concern shows community members a company's intention of taking pollution risks and other community burdens seriously.

Process



TOOLS AND RESOURCES

- [EPA EJ Screening and Mapping tool](#): This tool allows users to understand an area's demographic social vulnerability indicators, including pollution exposure indicators such as PM2.5, Ozone, NATA Diesel, and NATA Air Toxics Cancer Risk.
- [EERE Lead Tool](#): A source of information on energy burdens and how low- and moderate-income households are affected by energy affordability
- [The U.S. Climate Vulnerability Index](#): An index to assess a specific area's overall climate vulnerability, such as to extreme weather, flooding, wild-fire, and other physical climate risks.
- [Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool \(CEJST\)](#): An interactive map that identifies communities experiencing burdens across eight categories: climate change, energy, health, housing, legacy pollution, transportation, water and wastewater, and workforce development
- [Technology-specific Overview](#): This document provides a general overview of potential benefits and impacts that different technology types might bring to a community. Determining the impacts of a specific technology on a community is a context-specific undertaking and given the range of implementation options, impacts will vary across technologies.

MODELS TO REPLICATE

In 2010, the Alliance for a Better Community (ABC) conducted a Community Health Assessment of Boyle Heights and East Los Angeles. As part of this assessment, ABC partnered with a local organization, Healthy City, to connect with the community at large and understand community perspectives on the built environment and community health, and ultimately design policy proposals to address identified concerns. Through Participatory Asset Mapping, ABC gathered first-hand knowledge from community members about local food and recreation/physical activity assets and resources and any issues surrounding access to them. Community members expressed concern about the safety of public spaces and the accessibility of quality food options. This effort resulted in policy recommendations to increase the availability and accessibility of quality food options and adequate physical activity spaces, and implementing measures to make existing resources safer for community members.

Intentionally engage stakeholders

Authentic stakeholder engagement is a deliberate process that prioritizes robust community representation, deep collaboration, and trust-based relationships rather than expediency. Authentic stakeholder engagement centers the people closest to the issues in conversations and decision making, as they can best shape transformative solutions.



KEY INSIGHT

Engage well-rounded community stakeholder coalitions to maximize positive impact

To ensure that projects are in alignment with community needs and get buy-in, it is ideal to work with a coalition of community representatives. These formations can be referred to as Community Advisory Boards, Community Negotiating Teams, Community Working Groups, or similar. Regardless of the name, this formation will effectively function as a coalition.

There are several ways a company may engage with a coalition of stakeholders. In some cases, a neutral intermediary may be more effective in managing the engagement. Techniques may include:

- Liaise with a representative of an existing stakeholder coalition.
- Occupy a seat on an existing community stakeholder coalition, if that level of company engagement is welcomed by the coalition.
- Support the development of a new stakeholder coalition.
 - » This development could be led by the company, or by a trusted intermediary.
 - » If led by the company, defer to [the Blueprint for a Multiracial, Cross-Class Climate Movement](#), a comprehensive guide to developing inclusive, equitable, and effective coalitions. The report includes case studies and helpful models for structuring and organizing within coalitions. Refer to this resource in the early stages of coalition development for best practices and advice on how to set the coalition up for success. Circulate this resource within the coalition to jumpstart conversations about governance, vision, and process.

A robust coalition should have at least one:

- **Community-based organization** that is respected by the community, understands local dynamics, and can bring more community voices into discussions
- **Tribal representative** from the area who can ensure Indigenous perspectives and rights are respected
- **Union and labor representative** who can advocate for workers' rights and interests
- **Faith-based organization** that has deep community connections
- **Community development organization or planner** who is attuned to the broader context of a community's growth and change
- **Academic institution** that can contribute research, evaluation, and training expertise
- **Local elected official or municipal leader** who can provide high-level community perspective

To ensure the coalition reflects diverse perspectives, they should include leaders who can serve as:

- **Watchdogs** who provide oversight and accountability of corporate actions
- **Influencers** who can communicate with and mobilize different community segments
- **Technical experts** who contribute specialized knowledge and analysis
- **Skeptics** who raise important questions that strengthen the process
- **Supporters** who can help build momentum and drum up support from the community
- **Proximate neighbors** who can speak to the impacts of proposed plans

Avoid these common pitfalls!

PITFALL

Viewing the community as an obstacle to getting the project done, and assuming that the expertise of technical consultants is more important.

INSIGHT

Community members are assets that bring frontline experience and valuable place-based ideas to the table. This expertise cannot be gained without roots in the community.

ACTION

Respect the input of communities as expert knowledge and integrate their feedback into the development of benefits.

Process



Avoid these common pitfalls!

PITFALL

Assuming that elected officials represent the will and voice of the community and will deliver the project.

INSIGHT

Elected officials are not always the best barometer for community sentiments when it comes to development, and relying only on elected officials can result in outcomes that breed community opposition.

ACTION

Solicit feedback from a broad selection of people and community leaders. Elected officials should not be your sole source of community insight.



KEY INSIGHT

Engagement tactics can build OR erode trust with communities

Below are suggestions for approaching engagement in ways that build trust:

- Exercise patience and flexibility in the face of unforeseen delays. Relationships move at the speed of trust.
- Listen more than you speak. Don't react defensively to objections raised.
- Conduct community and stakeholder engagement early and often and throughout the life cycle of company presence in community, including pre-construction and decommissioning.
- Publicize engagement efforts and be transparent about who was contacted.
- Compile and publicize community feedback and communicate clearly how that feedback will be integrated into the process. Share how the community feedback impacted the outcome or trajectory of the project.
- Prioritize underrepresented voices in the community, including populations that have faced discrimination historically based on race, gender, ethnicity, or other aspects of identity.
- Ensure engagement efforts do not replicate past harms.
- Compensate individuals for their time whenever possible. Company representatives and intermediaries are being paid for their time, and community advisors should similarly be compensated for their time and expertise.
- Empower coalition members to engage local elected officials.
- Acknowledge power and resource differentials in the coalition and address them through the sharing of resources.
- Proactively address grievances.

MODELS TO REPLICATE

The [Illinois Clean Jobs Coalition](#) is a statewide coalition “made up of more than 200 climate groups, healthcare professionals, environmental justice champions, businesses, community leaders, labor unions, consumer advocates, faith-based and student organizations.” This diverse coalition spent over three years organizing and holding more than 100 “Listen. Lead. Share.” events to gather feedback and policy ideas from residents across the state. Interactive listening sessions were held in community spaces and offered ample opportunity for community members to share their visions for a just clean energy future, including goals that were [integrated into the final Illinois Climate and Equitable Jobs Act](#). It is estimated that this legislation could stimulate \$30 billion in new private renewables investments, and will result in equitable economic growth that benefits developers, the local economy, and disadvantaged communities.

TOOLS AND RESOURCES

- [The Principles of EJ](#) are foundational to understanding and working in partnership with the global environmental justice movement. Review these principles as you begin stakeholder engagement to understand how your proposed project fits into the overall vision for environmental justice and to build a shared language with concerned environmental justice advocates.
- [The Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing](#) is a set of six principles commonly used to guide partnership development and organizing in the environmental justice movement. Refer to these principles as you are developing a vision for robust and equitable community engagement. Consider how you can adjust processes to be in alignment with these principles.
- [Vote Solar's Partnership Principles](#) define the organization's aspiration approach to partnership and relationship development with frontline communities. These principles can be used as inspiration for defining your own organization's commitment to equitable partnerships.
- [The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership](#) characterizes approaches to community engagement along a spectrum in development stages, detailing the impact, activities, and resources required for each stage. Refer to this resource when planning engagement activities and continuously assess where activities fall along the spectrum, always aiming for deeper engagement and learning along the way.
- [The Index of Community Engagement Techniques](#) provides detailed descriptions and considerations for various community engagement techniques. When designing engagement plans, refer to this index and aim to integrate a range of techniques across the engagement spectrum.
- [The WEACTION Community Engagement Brief](#) offers an overview of community engagement best practices. Refer to this resource when developing engagement plans to increase participation and ensure that engagement techniques are as equitable as possible. This tool can also be a resource when evaluating progress toward engagement goals.

Co-develop community benefits

When a company begins benefit planning conversations with a community, the company must be transparent from the outset about the scope of benefits it can provide, the likelihood of the project moving forward, and any conditional factors or relevant considerations for the community. Leveraging the community impact and preliminary needs assessment, and the outcomes of community input sessions, can allow for realistic planning that can satisfy all sides.

Co-developing a timeline with target deadlines alongside the community stakeholder coalition is essential. It is important to recognize that the process is likely to take longer than a few months, with a more typical engagement lasting closer to 18 - 24 months. This planning timeline is longer than a typical industrial decarbonization project timeline, but shorter than the planning process required under the National Environmental Policy Act.



KEY INSIGHT

Be ready to meet community frustration constructively

In the development process, community members may approach the process with skepticism or antagonism. Community members may carry mistrust and grievances from previous malpractices by companies. Before approaching a community, have frank internal conversations about current levels of trust and how to reach high levels through authentic community engagement.

When conflict arises, companies should view it as an opportunity for reflection and understanding. Relying on intermediaries can be especially useful in these situations, as they can help translate points of tension into paths for moving forward.

TABLE 3 | General Timeframe for Engagement and Benefits Planning Activities

TASK	EXPECTED TIMEFRAME
Ready your organization	4 months
Develop an understanding of community context	2 to 3 months
Conduct environmental health and preliminary needs assessment	1 to 3 months
Engage stakeholders	3 to 6 months
Co-develop benefits	3 to 6 months
Formalize agreements	3 to 6 months
TOTAL	16 to 28 months

The timeline may be expedited if the company has a strong pre-existing relationship with the community, or if the community has an established coalition that meets regularly.

MODELS TO REPLICATE

Jobs to Move America’s labor coalition and United Steelworkers Local 675 (USW 675) negotiated a transformational [CBA](#) with electric bus manufacturer Proterra in Los Angeles County. The collaborative drafting process included a worker feedback provision that encourages ongoing feedback on worker related needs, creating greater trust between Proterra and community members.

The agreements’ clearly stated commitments include:

- 50% of new hires will be from significantly burdened employment community groups
- Development of a pre-hire and apprenticeship program for Electric Bus Manufacturing
- Strengthen Spanish to English language learning to accommodate ESL workers

TOOLS AND RESOURCES

- [Jobs To Move America](#): Resource center aimed at the manufacturing sector that organizes community coalitions, negotiates community benefits, and researches equitable community benefit agreements. Includes examples of previously negotiated agreements and contract language.
- [RMI Community Benefits Catalog](#): Examples of meaningful local benefits to consider as part of a community benefits process.
- [Making Development Projects Accountable](#): A guide to enforcement and accountability mechanisms to include as part of the community benefits structure.
- [Demystifying Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning](#): Helps the reader understand how to manage continued community engagement and integrate feedback in an iterative process.

Avoid these common pitfalls!

PITFALL

Assuming that meeting bare minimum legal or regulatory requirements can be counted as community benefits.

INSIGHT

Although required activities should be included as part of a community benefits process, true community benefits require two-way engagement and the co-creation of benefits with the community.

ACTION

Ensure that community benefits are co-created with the community and extend beyond legal and regulatory requirements. Delineate required activities in the final agreement vehicle.



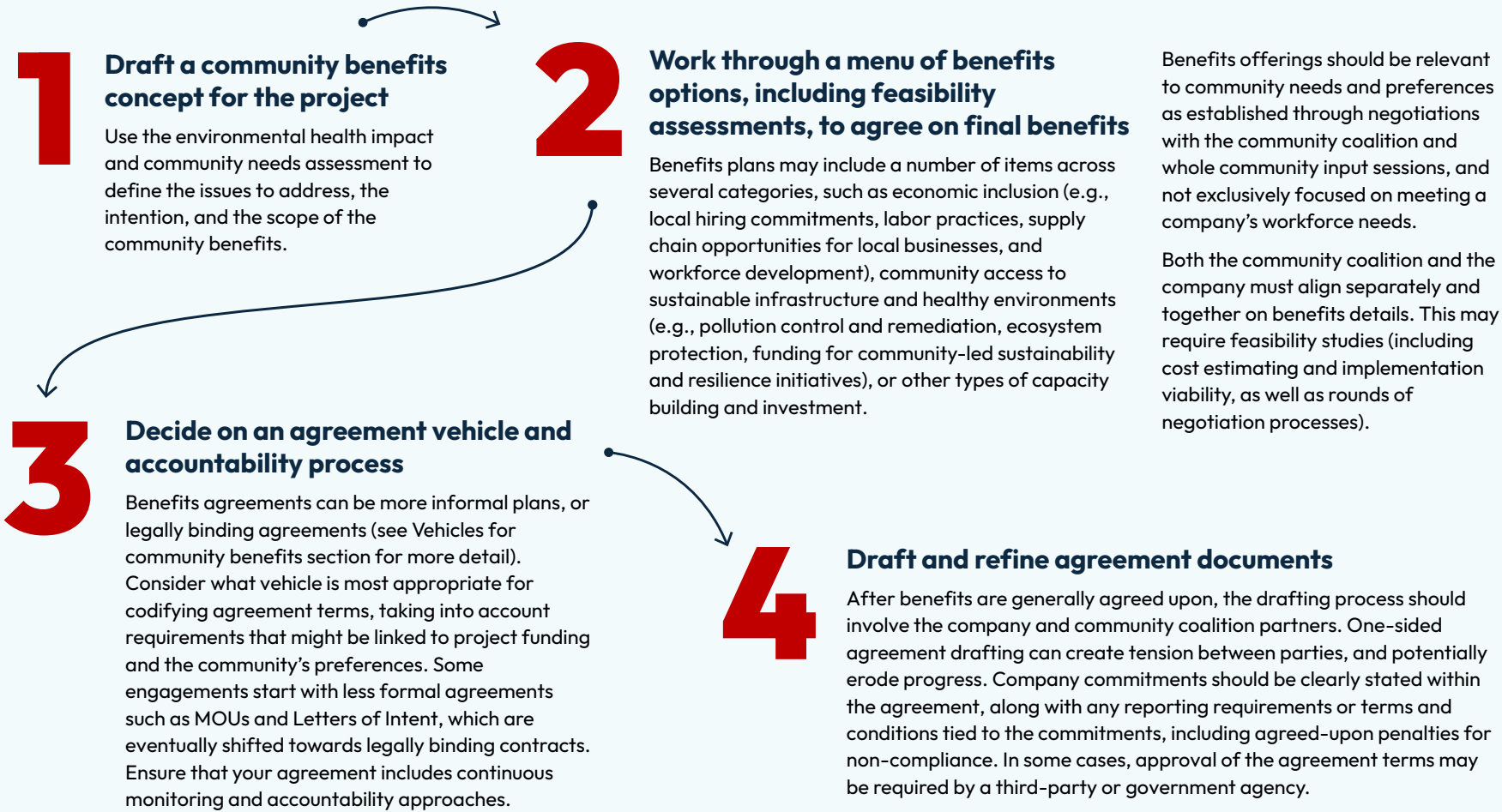
KEY INSIGHT

Expect ongoing accountability and engagement beyond community benefits agreement drafting

Expect the negotiating coalition to stay involved in monitoring and accountability of benefits delivery, according to terms in the agreement or informally. Local governments and other interested parties may have a role in ongoing monitoring.

Companies should welcome and prepare for continued engagement with the coalition beyond the signing of an agreement, offer their cooperation in the monitoring and accountability process, and remain connected to communities through ongoing community listening mechanisms facilitated by the coalition. Work with the coalition to establish a process and cadence for integrating community listening mechanisms into the monitoring and accountability process. Ensure that coalition and community feedback is integrated into reports and reports are accessible. Replicate engagement tactics that were effective in building the agreement and iterate on tactics that were less effective earlier in the process.

Process



Benefits offerings should be relevant to community needs and preferences as established through negotiations with the community coalition and whole community input sessions, and not exclusively focused on meeting a company's workforce needs.

Both the community coalition and the company must align separately and together on benefits details. This may require feasibility studies (including cost estimating and implementation viability, as well as rounds of negotiation processes).

Avoid these common pitfalls!

PITFALL

Assuming that it will be difficult or impossible to find qualified workers in the local market.

INSIGHT

Without an intentional focus on job training and workforce development, local income and wealth disparities can be exacerbated. Investing in workforce development pays dividends for companies.

ACTION

Commit to hiring local workforces for project development and commit to investing in workforce education for underrepresented populations when there is a need.

REPORTING AND EVALUATION BEST PRACTICES

- Required reports should be no less frequent than once a year and due by a particular date each year.
- Consider hiring a third-party evaluator to increase legitimacy and trust of results.
- View court action or arbitration as last-resort accountability actions and instead aim for a dispute-resolution system that avoids litigation. This can also be avoided by integrating a correction period into the community benefits vehicle that allows each party to correct problems once put on notice.
- Have at least one developer or infrastructure representative present at community engagement meetings and listening sessions whenever possible as this shows a commitment to growth and learning in the process.

Vehicles for community benefits

“Community benefits” is an umbrella term that includes a number of different vehicles that can be used to provide tangible, measurable, and community-driven benefits. Some of the most common vehicles include:



COMMUNITY BENEFITS PLAN (CBP)

- Non-legally enforceable agreements by a company, in consultation with the affected community
- Outline a company’s commitment to the community’s needs (e.g., affordable housing, job creation, etc.)
- Required by any project applying for Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding opportunities through the Department of Energy (DOE)
- Must include details about how the company will meet the DOE’s four core policy priorities:
 - » Investing in the workforce
 - » Engaging communities and labor
 - » Advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility
 - » Implementing Justice40
- Resource: [DOE Community Benefit Plan Template](#)

COMMUNITY BENEFITS AGREEMENT (CBA)

- Legal, private contracts between a company and a community coalition in which the company agrees to provide specific benefits to the community in exchange for the community coalition’s support of the company’s operations or a new development project
- Enforceable in court, which gives communities a stronger guarantee that the company will follow through on its commitments
- Outline specific benefits that the company will provide to the community in exchange for the community’s support of the project
- Not required as part of a CBP or for a DOE application, a CBA can be an outcome of a CBP
- Resource: [Fair Shake Legal Community Benefits Agreement Template](#)

HOST OR DEVELOPER AGREEMENT

Legal contract between a developer and a local government showing that the developer will accept certain requirements in exchange for local government support for the development

GOOD NEIGHBOR AGREEMENT

Legal private contract between an existing business and a community coalition in which the business agrees to change its behavior to support the community

COMMUNITY WORKFORCE AGREEMENT (CWA)

- Legal contract between a company, the local Building Trades Council, and contractors conducting work in the area
- Ensures major construction projects create quality job opportunities for local residents and disadvantaged workers

MEMORANDA OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU)

- Formal but non-binding agreement between a company and the community
- Dictates who does what, when, and for how long
- Resource: [MOU Template](#)

Additional Case Studies

FEDERAL GRANT

PECO Energy Company’s Grid Improvement Project

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), signed into law on November 15, 2021, authorizes \$1.2 trillion for transportation and infrastructure spending. As part of the law, the [Grid Deployment Office](#) will administer a \$10.5 billion investment via the Grid Resilience and Innovation Partnerships (GRIP) program to enhance grid flexibility and resilience. PECO Energy Company (PECO) applied for and received \$100 million in funding to support its [Creating a Resilient, Equitable, and Accessible Transformation in Energy for Greater Philadelphia \(CREATE\) plan](#). The plan comprises seven grid components that will allow PECO to address areas of PECO’s service territory susceptible to severe weather events that impact communities. The project brings grid improvements to PECO’s service territory susceptible to severe weather events that impact communities. Solutions include substation flood mitigation, upgrading underground monitoring and control techniques, deploying batteries for backup power, replacing aging infrastructure, and installing high-temperature, low-sag conductors to increase capacity.

Strong local support and jobs commitment

- The PECO project received nearly [50 letters of support](#) from elected officials, the City of Philadelphia, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection Energy Program Office, the Urban Affairs Coalition, and other local stakeholders involved in securing a community benefits agreement.
- The project will create over 2,600 jobs across southeastern Pennsylvania and includes several workforce and community benefits.

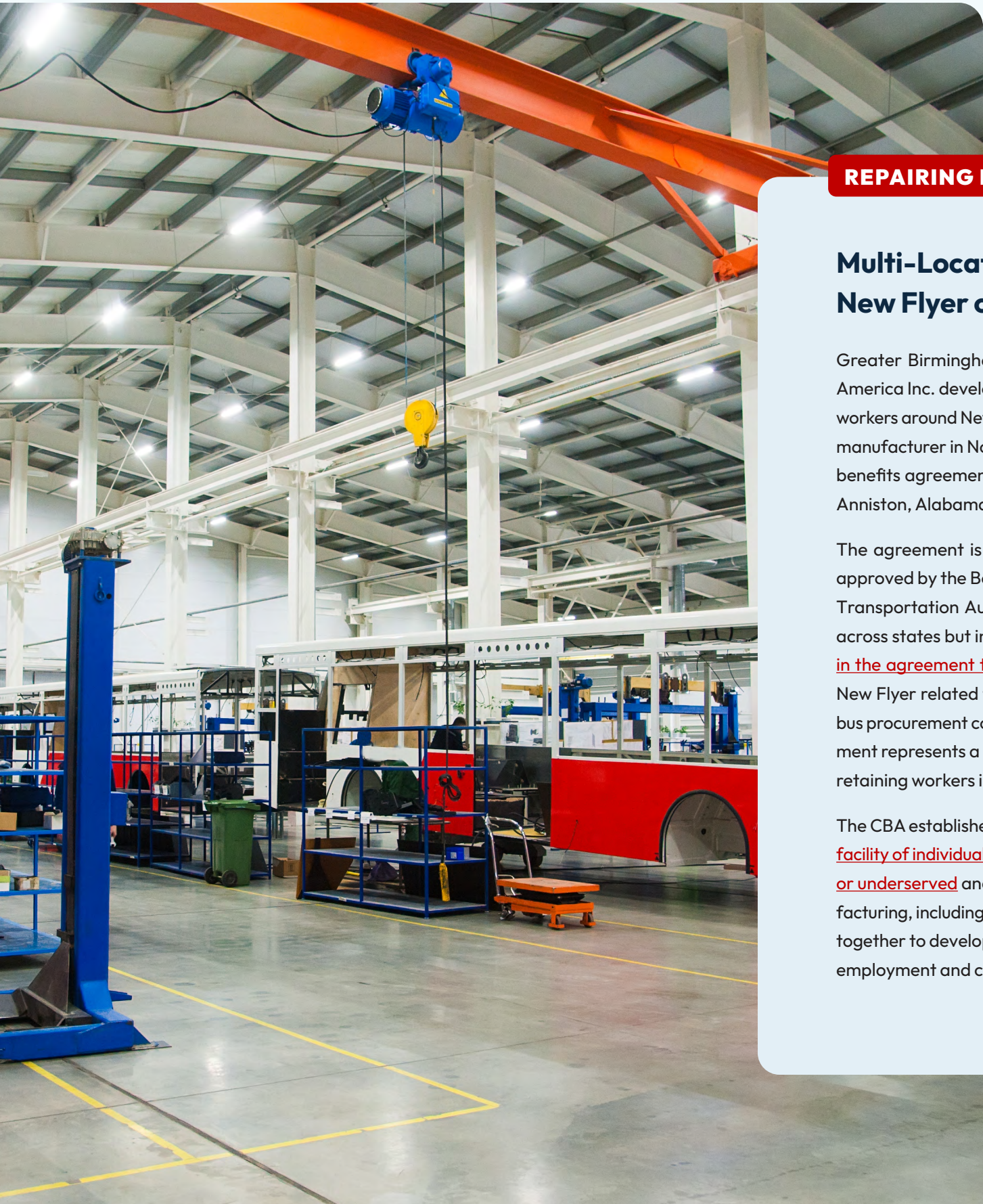
Underserved communities are prioritized

- A target of 40% of localized distribution grid benefits and climate resilience improvements will go toward customers in disadvantaged communities (DACs) in Philadelphia and the Delaware and Montgomery counties.
- Funds will support the Clean and Resilient Community Schools partnership, which drives equitable, inclusive, and accessible deployment of clean energy technologies to public schools in DACs.

Clear feedback and accountability mechanisms

- An Environmental Justice Advisory Committee (EJAC) of community leaders will provide continuous feedback on the project and PECO’s engagement with DACs.
- Plan to work with the Philadelphia Building Trades Council to ensure positions created through the project provide good pay, benefits, and opportunities for training and skill development.





REPAIRING PAST HARMS

Multi-Location Agreement with New Flyer of America

Greater Birmingham Ministries, Jobs to Move America, and New Flyer of America Inc. developed a multi-state agreement to support communities and workers around New Flyer manufacturing facilities. New Flyer is the largest bus manufacturer in North America and a leader in electric buses. The community benefits agreement, signed on May 24, 2022, impacts New Flyer facilities in Anniston, Alabama, and Ontario, CA.

The agreement is part of a comprehensive settlement package that was approved by the Board of Directors for the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority. This agreement is significant not just in its scale across states but in that it explicitly seeks to repair past harm acknowledged in the agreement text. Jobs to Move America had filed a complaint against New Flyer related to its reporting of wages and benefits tied to an LA Metro bus procurement contract. While New Flyer admits no wrongdoing, this agreement represents a new transparent and collaborative approach to hiring and retaining workers in Anniston and Ontario.

The CBA establishes goals of 45% of new hires and 20% of promotions at each facility of individuals from groups who have historically been underrepresented or underserved and have had limited access to good jobs in American manufacturing, including women, people of color, and veterans. Signatories will work together to develop robust training programs focused on increasing access to employment and career advancement for these communities.

ADDRESSES PREVIOUS CONCERNS WITH CLEAR ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS

- Requires tracking efforts to meet hiring and promotion goals and reporting to coalition partners on a quarterly basis, using tools and methods collaboratively agreed upon
- Designates a community organization to assist employees in making and resolving complaints through New Flyer’s internal complaint process about harassment and discrimination

PROVIDES TAILORED BENEFITS TO MEET SPECIFIC COMMUNITY NEEDS

- Spanish bilingual capacity will be improved in New Flyer’s outreach, recruitment, human resources, training materials, and workplace communications.
- A partnership agreement with local veteran assistance groups will offer wrap-around support to veterans interested in working at New Flyer facilities.

PROTECTS WORKERS

Opens the pathway to plant unionizing, which successfully happened at the Anniston plant in 2024



MULTI-STAKEHOLDER AGREEMENT

Vineyard Wind Enters Community Benefits Agreement and Local Host Community Agreement

In January 2015, Vineyard Wind and Vineyard Power, a developer and local non-profit, signed the nation’s [first federally recognized offshore wind Community Benefits Agreement](#). Vineyard Wind 1 is an active 806-megawatt wind farm off Martha’s Vineyard, Massachusetts coast. Once completed, the project will provide price-competitive clean energy to over 400,000 homes and businesses in the state. It is expected to generate [3,600 full-time equivalent job-years over the next 25 to 30 years](#). The agreement outlines mutual obligations for parties, including exploring opportunities for power purchase agreements benefiting local communities and creating job opportunities for locals. Vineyard Power also committed to advocating for offshore wind legislation in Massachusetts, providing educational outreach for the project, and offering guidance to the developer during the permitting and financing process.

Notably, Vineyard Wind also signed a [Host Community Agreement](#) with the Town and County of Nantucket, Massachusetts, the Maria Mitchell Association, and the Nantucket Preservation Trust. The Host Community Agreement establishes the [\\$4 million Nantucket Offshore Wind Community Fund](#) to support projects and initiatives related to protecting, restoring, and preserving cultural and historic resources, coastal resiliency, climate adaptation, renewable energy, and other priorities. \$3 million will be added to the fund for additional wind projects in the area.

SETS INTENTIONS FOR COLLABORATING ON FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Parties commit to investigating opportunities for debt financing that would facilitate the development of offshore wind projects in the established Lease Area

OFFERS FLEXIBILITY IN BENEFITS DEVELOPMENT

- Parties commit to ongoing conversations about community benefits not previously identified in order to enhance the benefits and value of the project. This provision has already led to the signing of an [agreement to protect critically endangered North Atlantic right whales](#).
- Vineyard Wind commits to invest up to [\\$10 million in projects and initiatives](#) to accelerate the development of the offshore wind supply chain, businesses, and infrastructure in Massachusetts and will work with the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center to manage the fund.

PART III

Community benefits ties to financing and permitting approvals

Increasingly, public sector and private sector stakeholders are incentivizing robust community involvement and benefits planning into large capital projects, through funding, permitting, or offtake provisions.

Federal Funding Requirements

Federal spending bills are passed by Congress to rebuild the nation’s economy, address aging infrastructure, spur technology innovation, and combat climate change. Many RTC Members are already or may in the future benefit from federal grant initiatives related to infrastructure development and technology innovation. Incorporating a robust CBP into grant applications improves the competitiveness of proposals, or in some cases is needed to satisfy basic eligibility criteria.

In developing CBPs related to federal funding opportunities, expect these considerations and core principles:

- Flexibility in approaches that accommodate a range of techniques that work best for specific companies and communities
- Accountability to plan details and outcomes such that specific approaches are conducive to ongoing evaluation, grant reporting, and approvals for proceeding to subsequent phases of funding release
- Robust engagement processes with community and labor groups that strengthen companies’ understanding of the local community context, include two-way discussions that shape project approaches, and situate long-term commitments to engagement processes and benefits plans
- Investment in workforce development that provides high quality jobs, fair labor practices, and training opportunities to develop skills and expand opportunities for local workers
- Economic inclusion for diverse workers and suppliers such that qualified contributors from diverse backgrounds have a fair chance at accessing jobs and contracting opportunities
- Investment in disadvantaged communities so communities suffering from legacies of pollution burden, discrimination, or low access to jobs benefit fairly from new infrastructure investment

State-wide Permitting and Funding

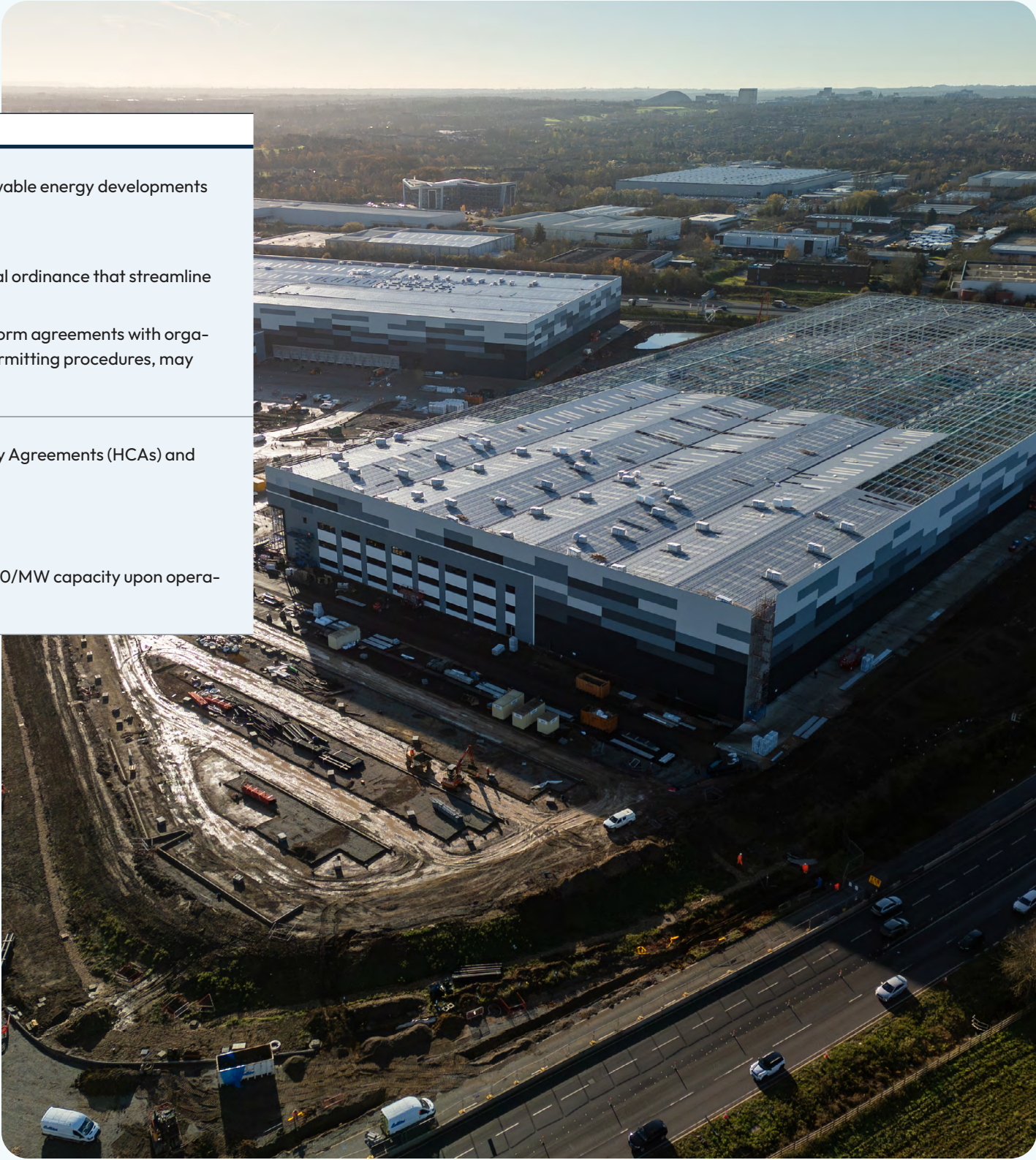
Multiple states have recently enacted legislation requiring community benefits agreements (CBA) or similar devices in the permitting process of large-scale infrastructure projects, including renewable energy facilities. New Jersey, California, New York, and Michigan explicitly require CBAs for the development of certain large-scale projects. This is a relatively recent policy trend, with the potential to spread to other states.

TABLE 4 | Highlight of state policies that require CBAs or other similar devices in the permitting process of large-scale infrastructure projects.

STATE	KEY DETAILS
New Jersey	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ In 2021, NJ became the first state to explicitly require Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) for certain development.■ The Economic Recovery Act (ERA) of 2020, enacted in January 2021, mandated CBAs for certain projects receiving state incentives and involving over \$10MM in capital investment.■ CBAs must constitute a tri-party agreement between a business, a municipality or county (the negotiator), and the NJ Economic Development Authority (NJEDA; the reviewer).■ After entering a CBA, the local government must appoint a Community Advisory Committee with at least three community members who monitor implementation and report progress to NJEDA annually. <p>Example agreement: in 2024, NJ Innovation Associates Urban Renewal, LLC signed a CBA with New Brunswick for the \$750MM HELIX project, which includes a \$1MM trust fund for community needs, plus an estimated \$500k for job training and youth leadership programs.</p>
New York	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Since 2019, NY has strengthened community benefits provisions, including environmental justice and community benefits requirements.■ The Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act of 2019 mandates that at least 35% of the benefits from clean energy and energy efficiency programs be directed to disadvantaged communities (DACs).■ The 2020 Accelerated Renewable Energy Growth and Community Benefit Act and the 2024 Renewable Action through Project Interconnection and Deployment (RAPID) Act are complementary pieces of legislation aimed at streamlining the permitting process for renewable energy and transmission projects.<ul style="list-style-type: none">» Renewable energy generation projects 25 MW or larger must have benefit agreements with host communities.» Projects of this size must pay an annual fee of \$500-\$1,000/MW of nameplate capacity for the purpose of providing an evenly distributed bill credit to residential utility customers in each host municipality.» Local government agencies and community intervenors can access up to \$1,000/MW to enable their effective participation in the permitting process; permit approvals are contingent upon host community benefits, though legally binding CBAs are not explicitly required. <p>Example agreement: Through the Build-Ready Program to accelerate development on underutilized sites, the Town of Brookhaven in 2023 signed a \$169.9MM, 25-year Host Community Agreement with Sunrise Wind, granting access to public land for offshore wind transmission cables. The agreement funds community projects, including a Tri-Hamlet Park and Forge River watershed sewer expansion, and commits to investments in local infrastructure, job creation, and training programs, including \$10MM for a National Offshore Wind Training Center and \$5MM for research at Stony Brook University.</p>

State-wide Permitting and Funding

STATE	KEY DETAILS
California	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The 2022 Assembly Bill 205 requires CBAs as a condition of permitting for certain energy projects, include renewable energy developments of 50MW or greater.■ Agreements are made between developers and community-based organizations.■ The California Energy Commission (CEC) holds authority to certify these projects, and if necessary, override local ordinance that streamline the permitting process.■ A challenge with this model is the broad definition of who can represent the community, allowing developers to form agreements with organizations that do not appropriately represent local interests; this, along with the potential for overriding local permitting procedures, may create conflict with host communities.
Michigan	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The 2023 Michigan House Bill 5120 amended MI’s clean energy and climate legislation to include Host Community Agreements (HCAs) and CBAs into the certification process for new facilities.■ These rules apply to wind, solar, and energy storage facilities as part of permitting and siting processes.■ The Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) oversees certification and can override local government rules.■ Starting in November 2024, developers must sign an HCA with local governments, including a payment of \$2,000/MW capacity upon operation OR enter a CBA with community-based organizations with the same financial value.



Local Ordinances and Permitting

Local governments are also increasingly adopting ordinances, permitting processes, and other mechanisms requiring developers to deliver community benefits. Select examples are in Table 5.

TABLE 5 | Local ordinances that require community benefits

STATE	KEY DETAILS
Detroit, MI	<ul style="list-style-type: none">In 2016, Detroit enacted the Community Benefits Ordinance (CBO), requiring developers of large-scale projects to engage with local communities.Amended in 2021, the ordinance mandates that projects valued at \$75MM or more, or receiving significant city incentives, must include community benefits in the project’s final development agreement.The CBO includes explicit mechanisms for community representation and enforcement of the agreement, including the establishment of a Neighborhood Advisory Council (NAC) charged with advising the developer of the concerns of the impacted community.
St. Petersburg, FL	<ul style="list-style-type: none">In 2021, Community Benefits Advisory Council (CBAC) was situated to require developers receiving public assistance to provide benefits to local community members.<ul style="list-style-type: none">The CBAC is comprised of four members who serve 3–4-year terms and represent different community perspectives.The required community benefits package that a developer must provide is determined through collaboration with CBAC and community meetings, with final approval by City Council.Benefits may include affordable housing, environmental resiliency, as well as sustainability, equitable workforce and economic opportunities, and more.The City’s MOU with Duke Energy Florida for Clean Energy Collaboration does not include an explicit tie to CBAC, but does refer to multiple types of development and an intention to collaborate towards Solar for Community Benefit.
Tampa, FL	<p>In 2023, City Council passed a Community Benefits Agreement program that requires developers that receive public funds to provide community benefits.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">A multi-person advisory council is appointed by the mayor and City Council selected from applicants; members serve varying term lengths.Benefits can include environmental resiliency and sustainability initiatives that align with the city’s decarbonization goals.
Cleveland, OH	<p>The 2023 Community Benefit Agreements (CBA) Ordinance requires CBAs for development projects receiving \$250k or more in city assistance, with the required minimum benefits linked to overall project budget.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Standard CBA requirements apply to projects with budgets under \$20MM and include a set list of required benefits focused on economic inclusion and workforce opportunities in project delivery and holding at least three community input sessions.Expanded CBA requirements apply to projects with budget over \$20MM and adds expectations for further benefits such as additional economic inclusion investments, adherence to green building standards, contributions to community equity funds, and more, as negotiated with the relevant City department.





Private Sector Involvement

Companies are increasingly including community benefits considerations in how they meet their renewable energy and other sustainability goals, for reasons that are both financial and align with their broader corporate missions. Examples from the renewable energy development sector may be particularly instructive to RTC Members, as communities hosting renewable thermal infrastructure may similarly expect that there should be robust benefits to the local economy and community. Without this sharing of benefits, local contesting of project siting can lead to more formal restrictions of infrastructure development at local and state government levels, creating obstacles that drive up costs and constrain the growth of emergent energy sectors. Some private sector renewable energy buyers have found value in the voluntary adoption of workforce and community benefits provisions within their energy supply agreements.

EXAMPLES INCLUDE:

- [Microsoft and Volt Energy Equity Power Purchase Agreement](#): Microsoft has pioneered an innovative approach to their power purchase agreements (PPAs) with renewable energy developers that prioritizes economic inclusion within the supply chain and creates community impact funds to resource local, community-led resilience and sustainability initiatives. One PPA with Volt Energy Utility is detailed in a public lessons learned white paper that includes contracting excerpts to help other companies integrate these provisions into their energy supply agreements.
- [Google and Sol System Invest in Local Community Support in North and South Carolina](#): An agreement between Google and Sol System to invest in 225 MWdc of new solar energy generation and 18MW of battery storage includes a commitment to concurrently invest in the reduction of energy burden for low- and moderate-income households near the development sites. Local organizations, including the Roanoke Electric Cooperative (NC), Santee Electric Cooperative (SC), Aiken Electric Cooperative (SC), and the Sustainable Institute of South Carolina will work with homeowners to provide critical home repairs and energy efficiency upgrades.
- [Rivian, The Nature Conservancy, and BrightNight Transform Kentucky Starfire Mine](#): This initiative brings a \$1B solar and transmission infrastructure investment to former mine lands. Rivian and The Nature Conservancy selected the project after a competitive process that assessed proposals for maximum positive impacts on climate, conservation, and communities. BrightNight’s approach to community engagement and development support for the priority initiatives of local residents helped differentiate the project.
- [Clean Energy Buyers Institute \(CEBI\) establishes Principles for Purpose-driven Energy Procurement with Beyond the Megawatt initiative](#): This initiative provides primers and resources for corporate renewable energy buyers looking to maximize the environmental and social outcomes of the clean energy transition.

Appendix A

Glossary

Accessibility	A practice in equitable, responsible design. This practice requires providing equitable opportunity to access, engage, and interact with information, a project, initiative, etc., regardless of a person’s abilities or circumstances.
Accountability	To be held responsible for accomplishing an established goal or action. To be account-able, one must be visible, with a transparent agenda and process.
Asset Mapping	The process of identifying and gathering information about a community’s assets. An asset is any resource or strength found already within a community, which can be used to uncover effective solutions, to promote social inclusion, and improve the health and well-being of its citizens. It is a strengths-based approach that relies on the core belief that good things already exist within a community.
Climate Risk Vulnerability	The tendency of people, ecosystems, and species, economic, social and cultural assets, and services to be affected by climate-related hazards; a product of risk sensitivity and adaptive capacity.
Community	A community is a collective of individuals who share a common identity, which can be based on factors such as geographic location, cultural or ethnic background, socioeco-nomic experience, shared interests and values, and more.
Community Advisory Board (CAB)	Composed of community members who share an identity, geography, history, language, culture, or other characteristic or experience, and convened to contribute community voice to an initiative, program, policy, or project. CAB members are expected to voice community perspectives and priorities to protect communities from harm and optimize community benefits. These groups generally serve as the main negotiating bodies in the benefits development process. Also referred to as Community Negotiating Teams, Community Working Groups or similar.
Community Based Organization (CBO)	CBOs are organizations with a mission specifically dedicated to a community defined by place or population. CBOs include social service agencies, nongovernmental organiza-tions (NGOs), and formal and informal community groups, such as neighborhood associa-tions or special-interest clubs. Ideally, CBOs are physically based in the communities they serve, though in some cases CBOs can be effective even without a physical presence. Also known as a Community Serving Organization.

Community Benefits	Benefits that improve the quality of life for a community in a tangible and measurable way in a discrete time period. Also referred to as direct benefits. The benefits reflect community priorities for addressing barriers the community has communicated.
Community Benefits Agreement (CBA)	A community benefits agreement is a voluntary but legally binding agreement between a developer or company and nearby community organizations that directs benefits from new development projects to local people. These benefits vary based on a community's needs; they can include employment provisions, new infrastructure, and resources for the community such as affordable housing, public parks, job training programs and/or measures to protect the environment. In some cases, a local or state agency may play an active role in negotiations and can act as an enforcer of an agreement.
Community Benefits Ordinance (CBO)	A municipal law that requires community benefits provisions for certain large-scale development projects.
Community Benefits Plan (CBP)	A community benefits plan is a non-legally binding roadmap for how a developer will engage with communities during a project. While they do not always include designated funding or enforcement mechanisms, CBPs can help pave the way for future, legally binding community benefits agreements by laying some of the groundwork and bringing stakeholders together early on.
Community Engagement	The process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people. It often involves partnerships and coalitions that help mobilize resources and influence systems, change relationships among partners, and serve as catalysts for changing policies, programs, and practices. Also sometimes referred to as stakeholder engagement.
Community Stakeholder	<p>Any person, organization, or institution impacted by a project, initiative, policy, or organization.</p> <p>Includes people who should have a say and involvement in decisions, as well as groups/ people who represent particular interests, like environmental groups, CBOs, etc.</p>

Community Workforce Agreement (CWA)	CWAs are a specific type of Project Labor Agreement (PLA) that includes community-oriented commitments relating to equitable workforce development, social justice, small business support, and/or other issues. These agreements also include provisions that bind all contractors and subcontractors to the agreement; guarantee that no strikes or lock-outs will occur; and set-forth mutually agreed upon grievance/ arbitration procedures. CWAs in the private sector are enforced the same way PLAs are enforced.
Disadvantaged Community (DAC)	<p>DOE recognizes disadvantaged communities as those census tracts identified by the White House Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST), which is located at https://screeningtool.geoplatform.gov/.</p> <p>For the “common condition” definition of community, federally recognized tribal lands and U.S. territories are categorized as disadvantaged in accordance with OMB’s Interim Implementation Guidance. Nationwide, the CEJST identifies approximately 27,251 census tracts as disadvantaged. Several states have different approaches to defining disadvantaged communities.</p>
Diversity	How people differ, including race, ethnicity, and gender — the groups that most often come to mind when the term diversity is used — but also age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, and physical appearance. It can also involve different ideas, perspectives, and values.
Energy Burden	The percentage of gross household income spent on energy costs. It is calculated by dividing the average housing energy cost by the average annual household income. A household with 6% or greater energy burden is considered to be a high energy burden household.
Environmental Health	The branch of public health that focuses on the interrelationships between people and their environment. It investigates how our surroundings—both natural and human-made—can affect our health.
Environmental Justice	The Environmental Justice Movement has expanded the concept of the environment beyond traditional notions of conservation, recognizing it as encompassing the places where we inhabit daily life—where we live, work, play, learn, and pray. Environmental justice is achieved when all individuals can fully actualize their potential without facing barriers erected by environmental racism or inequity. It advocates for a society where every person, regardless of background or socioeconomic status, enjoys the fundamental right to a healthy environment, fostering equity and well-being for all.

Equity	The practice of ensuring fairness by customizing the distribution of resources and opportunities to meet the specific needs and circumstances of individuals or groups. It involves acknowledging and addressing disparities and systemic barriers to ensure that everyone has a fair chance to succeed and achieve positive outcomes, regardless of their background or identity.
Frontline Communities	The populations most impacted by multiple and cumulative sources of pollution and climate impacts due to proximity to toxic factories, fossil fuel refineries, neighborhood oil drilling, freeways, and the like, often without access to clean drinking water or public investment.
Good Neighbor Agreement (GNA)	Legal private contract between an existing business and a community coalition in which the business agrees to change its behavior to support the community.
Host Community Agreement (HCA)	Legal contract between a developer and a local government showing that the developer will accept certain requirements in exchange for local government support for the development.
Inclusion	The act of including traditionally excluded individuals and/or groups into processes, activities, and decision-making in a way that shares power with authenticity.
Local Hiring Commitment	A typically binding commitment to hire workers from the local community or from targeted populations in the community.
NIMBYism	Shorthand for "not-in-my-backyard," a mentality adopted by those who reject certain changes to their communities. Although many types of development can provoke NIMBY attitudes, energy projects have increasingly incited this type of pushback.
Power Purchase Agreement (PPA)	A Power Purchase Agreement is an agreement between a wholesale energy producer and a utility under which the utility agrees to purchase power. The agreement includes details such as the rates paid for electricity and the time period during which it will be purchased.

Project Labor Agreement (PLA)	Pre-hire collective bargaining agreement negotiated between one or more construction unions and one or more construction employers (contractors/project owners) that establish the terms and conditions of employment for a specific construction project. Essential elements of PLAs include provisions that bind all contractors and subcontractors to the agreement; no-strike, no-lockout clauses; and grievance/arbitration procedures. Agreements also specify the wages and fringe benefits for all workers on a project and generally require contractors to hire workers for the project through a union hiring hall that is responsible for supplying skilled labor. Agreements may also include clauses: outlining goals for hiring local community members on projects; incorporating equity plans; detailing strategic recruitment policies for workers from underserved communities; and requiring participation of small businesses.
Resilience	The capacity of a system (this could be a community, an economy, etc.) to maintain an intact core identity in the face of change. Also, a state of dynamic balance within which change can be avoided or recovered from without a fundamental transition to a new form.
Sustainability	Sustainability is the practice of meeting present needs while safeguarding resources and opportunities for future generations, achieved through balancing environmental conservation, social equity, and economic viability. It involves promoting harmony with nature, ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities, and fostering economic systems that support long-term well-being for both people and the planet.
Underrepresented Community or Population	A group that is less represented in one subset (e.g., employees in a particular sector) than in the general population. Can also refer to gender, race/ ethnicity, physical or mental ability, LGBTQ+ status, and many more.
Vulnerable Population or Vulnerable Communities	Often used synonymously with “frontline communities,” “under-resourced communities,” or “marginalized populations.” Populations including low-income communities, older adults, children, and health-compromised individuals of any race or socioeconomic status that are especially harmed by climate impacts. Due to a lack of resources or presence of biological sensitivities, these populations are more at risk of experiencing adverse effects from climate impacts.
Workforce Development	Refers to a range of strategies, initiatives, and educational activities that aim to enhance the skills and competencies of people engaged in or available for work. Initiatives should equip individuals with the necessary tools, knowledge, and training to meet current and future job demands. The best workforce development initiatives integrate wrap-around support to ensure retention of trainees.

Appendix B

Menu of Sample Community Benefits

A selection of example community benefits that may be applicable to RTC Members’ industrial decarbonization development projects. Additional examples are accessible through the [resource library](#).

CATEGORY OF BENEFITS	EXAMPLES
Community Development Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Construction of a 5-acre park to increase green spaces in the local community■ Providing \$100,000 in upgrades to local community centers to encourage physical activity and increase community health■ Partnering with local leadership to host job fairs to increase community employment rates■ Creation of a community fund that community groups can apply to for funding to provide local community services
Community Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Developing child-care facilities to lift child-care burdens for local workers■ Supporting community members who struggle with substance abuse and mental health issues by creating counseling centers■ Providing \$100 monthly stipends to parents for pre-school costs■ Organizing vaccination clinics to ensure community health■ Crafting youth development programs to increase local college acceptance rates
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Supporting English as a Second Language (ESL) training■ Providing technical certification training to increase the local workforce’s technical skills■ Creating grant programs for local colleges and students through fellowships and scholarships
Entrepreneurship	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Committing a % of contracted spending on small, emerging, or diverse-owned businesses■ Funding accelerator programs aimed at increasing participation of underrepresented groups in projects

CATEGORY OF BENEFITS	EXAMPLES
Environmental Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Reducing local energy burdens by placing solar panels on local schools and/or local recreation centers■ Funding local resiliency efforts like bridges and rooftop repairs■ Installing heat pumps into local community buildings and/or homes
Fair Wages	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Providing livable wages to the local workforce■ Enforcing a worker led feedback system to provide criticism of unfair practices■ Insurance benefits that cover annual check-ups and dental
Worker Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Establishing project labor agreements with local unions■ Creating worker safety programs that can be improved by employee feedback as concerns arise
Workforce Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ 60% of new hires for the project will be from the local community■ Development of a job center to encourage workforce development■ Development of a pre-hire and apprenticeship program for local employees■ Establishing reentry workforce programs to support individuals who were formerly incarcerated

Appendix C

Process Management Tool Template (Visual Example)

A process management tool template, accessible in the [Resource Library](#), can be tailored for specific engagement and benefits planning efforts to manage the overall effort, including status tracking, assignment responsibility parties, and mapping action steps.

[Company Name] [Facility/Site Name] Last updated: Community Benefits Engagement Plan Insert date here when updated									
Area	Action	Implementation Tips	Status	Responsible party	Start date	Due date	Site-specific Implementation notes	Initial next steps	Status Update Notes
Ready your organization	Assess internal capacity & select the team for benefits planning	- Sustainability, community affairs, economic affairs, facility development or other internal functions are reasonable candidates to lead an engagement approach	Completed		mm/dd/yyyy	mm/dd/yyyy			
	Buy-in from leadership and key departments	- What are points of alignment between the company's mission and values? - What business imperatives can be advanced through community support? - What are the risks of inaction (such as development delays)?	Completed		mm/dd/yyyy	mm/dd/yyyy			
	Understand the company's reputation with community	- How is the company perceived by workers and community members? - Any community initiatives already in place?	Delayed		mm/dd/yyyy	mm/dd/yyyy			
	Partner with intermediaries	- Suggestions for how to choose an intermediary provided in the resource library	In Progress		mm/dd/yyyy	mm/dd/yyyy			
Develop an understanding of community context	Complete a community power mapping exercise	- An example power mapping exercise is available in Appendix X of the Community Benefits Handbook	Not started		mm/dd/yyyy	mm/dd/yyyy			
	Identify information sources for community composition, history and context	- Pursue all potential sources of information - Common sources include archives, local journalists, non-profit leaders, chambers of commerce, unions, local governmental, and community groups	Not started		mm/dd/yyyy	mm/dd/yyyy			
	Develop a standard list of questions to capture community context and local histories		Not started		mm/dd/yyyy	mm/dd/yyyy			
	Determine research method for pursuing each source	- Research methods include desktop research, individual interview, group interview, community survey, and GIS-based analysis	Not started		mm/dd/yyyy	mm/dd/yyyy			
	Synthesize results to inform engagement strategy	- Leveraging these results is essential to successful community engagement	Not started		mm/dd/yyyy	mm/dd/yyyy			

Resource Library

Supplemental resources are available in the RTC community benefits handbook [resource library](#). The resource library contains additional documents and guidance to support your community benefits planning journey, including example templates for community benefits, examples of community benefits, additional case studies, and a collection of non-federally managed mapping resources.