Equity Workstream Report

EPIC POLICY + INNOVATION COORDINATION GROUP

FEBRUARY 2021

This report was completed by The Accelerate Group, a consultant to the California Public Utilities Commission and the Project Coordinator for the EPIC Policy + Innovation Coordination Group. The information herein was collected and summarized by the Project Coordinator, with input from members of the EPIC Policy + Innovation Coordination Group, and does not reflect an official position of the California Public Utilities Commission.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The overall goal of the equity workstream was to create a framework for equitable engagement in EPIC and other similar research, development and deployment (RD&D) projects – how researchers, technology solutions providers, and communities can work in partnership to achieve equity goals in project design, development, execution, results, and process. This was developed by gaining an understanding from presenters on lessons learned and best practices for community engagement in RD&D and pilot projects. The workstream conducted three meetings between September and December 2020.

More than 200 individuals participated in the three 90-minute workstream meetings, including California Public Utilities Commission and California Energy Commission staff and Commissioners, RD&D project leaders, utilities, community leaders, technology solution providers, and researchers.

Learning #1: Community engagement in RD&D should start before site selection.

Effective community engagement prior to a project being designed and developed can ensure that a project is successful at gaining community support for, participation in, and benefit from energy programs – a result that is positive for both the researchers and the community.

Learning #2. Local credibility and knowledge are vital to community buy-in and project impact.

EPIC projects participating in the workstream identified that establishing local credibility and knowledge by engaging community-specific stakeholders and gaining community-specific data will create more local benefits, increase the likelihood of project success, and make the project more relevant.

Learning #3: Community engagement should be used to co-create project goals, and not be seen as a checkbox.

Presenters in this workstream emphasized the need to adequately engage community members through the co-creation of project goals, vision, and scope through an authentic process, and be open to adjusting project plans based on community engagement throughout a project.

Learning #4: Benefitting a community requires more than simply locating a project there.

Just because a project is located in a disadvantaged community does not necessarily mean the project delivers equitable benefits to the disadvantaged community. The project site selection should be a thoughtful process that not only uses local data to inform technological compatibility, but also uses insights from local leaders to determine fit.

Learning #5: Equity, diversity and inclusion in EPIC projects should be measurable.

Equity in EPIC projects also means equity in process, and presenters discussed ways to develop, measure, and track equitable processes in RD&D projects. That includes bringing on team members from a variety of backgrounds, respecting every person's individual contributions to a project, understanding project impact, evaluating failure, considering diversity of thought, and more.

Learning #6: Equitable research can also be achieved through improved assessments, solicitations, and funding structures.

Presenters described how third-party assessments of research funding programs can help identify ways to develop funding and solicitation structures to spur development in vulnerable communities, and how research funding structures can often exclude thoughtful community partnerships and community-focused projects.

Learning #7: Early engagement strategies should be tailored to meet specific needs for each community.

In community engagement, panelists said project leaders who don't prioritize community needs can talk past residents, leading community members to feel the information they are receiving is either irrelevant to their interests or overwhelming to understand. Panelists outlined several methods for tailoring early community engagement to the specific needs for each community.

Learning #8: Project leaders and researchers should engage CBOs as paid project partners to achieve equitable research.

Presenters in this workstream discussed opportunities to improve research practices and community engagement by identifying community-based organizations that are recommended and vetted by local stakeholders and appropriately compensating them for the time and expertise they bring to the project.

Key Opportunities for Coordination and Collaboration

- The California Energy Commission is currently using its Empower Innovation Events to build relationships between communities and researchers. Further, it is using its Empower Innovation Network web platform to help connect potential project partners, by creating a “Places” page where communities can feature potential demonstration sites and highlight the clean energy needs of that location.

- The California Energy Commission is looking to develop a map to identify community-based organizations working in and with low-income and disadvantaged communities.

- The California Energy Commissioner, the California Public Utilities Commission, and other stakeholders, should explore the obstacles to community engagement and participation in the EPIC program, and discuss the opportunity, need, and potential structure of a technical assistance component of the EPIC program to empower more community participation.

BACKGROUND

What is the Policy + Innovation Coordination Group?

The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) oversees and monitors the implementation of the ratepayer-funded Electric Program Investment Charge (EPIC) research, development, and deployment program. For current EPIC funds from investment periods 1, 2, and 3, there are four program administrators: the California Energy Commission (CEC), Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E), Southern California Edison (SCE), and San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E).

In Decision 18-10-052, the CPUC established the Policy + Innovation Coordination Group (PICG)—comprised of a Project Coordinator, the four Administrators, and the CPUC—to better align EPIC investments and program execution with CPUC and California energy policy needs.

Selection of the Workstream

In August 2020, the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) launched four Partnership Areas where RD&D projects funded through the CPUC's EPIC Program could accelerate innovation and create a positive feedback loop between the State's electricity RD&D efforts and emerging energy policy challenges: equity, transportation electrification, wildfire mitigation, and public safety power shutoffs. The Partnership Areas were identified as critical and timely for decision-making for 2020.

To facilitate productive input, the Policy + Innovation Coordination Group established workstreams for each Partnership Area to allow RD&D project leaders and stakeholders to share their direct experience with RD&D projects, identify policy obstacles to new and emerging technology adoption, help inform ongoing and upcoming Commission proceedings and other policy deliberations, and create new collaborations to accelerate energy innovation.

Workstream Goals

The overall goal of the Equity Workstream was to create a framework for equitable engagement in RD&D projects – how researchers, technology solutions providers, and

communities can work in partnership to achieve equity goals in project design, development, execution, results, and process. This was developed by gaining an understanding from presenters on lessons learned and best practices for community engagement in RD&D and pilot projects.

Equity is important in the process of developing and implementing EPIC and other energy programs. Program implementers face obstacles in understanding what disadvantaged communities (DACs), tribal lands, and low-income households and communities actually need from a clean energy research, development, and demonstration effort. This gap leads to difficulty in developing innovative research, development, and demonstration projects that aren't just located in DACs, on tribal lands, and in low-income communities, but actually work to overcome access and equity barriers in these communities. As our electric grid continues to transform and evolve, it is critical to consider the implications of new technologies and policies on disadvantaged communities.

The electric grid is complex and ever-changing, and so are community needs across California. It is imperative that we advance our energy economy in a way that is equitable and most effective for our diverse community needs. Inclusive energy program design will help us design the right energy programs and infrastructure for Californians while ensuring that low-income families are not left behind.

Workstream Schedule

Equity Workstream Meeting #1
Gathering lessons learned from DAC projects
October 6, 2020
Equity Meeting #1 focused on EPIC and other RD&D projects and 1) how to communicate with and engage disadvantaged communities prior to project deployment, 2) how to select the location of the project, and 3) how community members want to engage with RD&D projects.

Equity Workstream Meeting #2
Gathering lessons learned from DAC projects
October 15, 2020
Equity Meeting #2 focused on EPIC and other RD&D projects working on 1) methods for communication and engagement with disadvantaged communities prior to project

deployment, 2) how the location of the project was selected, and 3) how community members want to engage with RD&D projects.

Equity Workstream Meeting #3
Equitable engagement, and opportunities for coordination
December 3, 2020
Equity Meeting #3 invited project administrators to provide an overview of opportunities and mechanisms for disadvantaged communities to engage in RD&D and EPIC projects. The session also featured a presentation from the Greenlining Institute discussing the Greenlining Racial Equity Research Report, which shares best practices for working with community-based organizations in developing research projects.

Presentations

Presenter	Organization
Andrew Barbeau	EPIC Policy + Innovation Coordination Group
David Diaz	Active SGV
Sascha von Meier	UC Berkeley
Matt Belaso	Pittsburg Unified School District
Daniel Kammen	UC Berkeley
Stephanie Berkland	TRC Engineers, Inc.
Amee Raval	Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN)
Ram Narayanamurthy	EPRI
Alexandria McBride	City of Oakland
Mack Knobbe	SCE
Prajwal Gautam	SCE
Erik Stokes	California Energy Commission
Renee Cinar	SCE
Hana Creger	Greenlining Institute

EQUITY MEETING #1

Equity Meeting #1 was held virtually on October 6, 2020 from 4:30-6:00 pm Pacific Standard Time. The meeting focused on EPIC and other RD&D projects and discussed 1) how to communicate with and engage disadvantaged communities prior to project deployment, 2) how the location of the project was selected, and 3) how community members want to engage with RD&D projects.

Equity Meeting #1 featured five panelists from industry, university, and local community groups. Their presentations addressed some or all of the following core questions:

RD&D Leaders

- What methods of communication and engagement were used in this community prior to project deployment?
- How was the location(s) of the project selected? What was the community involvement in this process?
- How were technical concepts communicated to the community? Describe the challenges and successes with community engagement?

Community Members

- What methods of engagement were used by the RD&D project leaders before, during and after (if applicable) the implementation of the project?
- What aspects of an RD&D project do community members and community-based organizations want to be involved in?
- How did RD&D project leaders communicate technical concepts?
- What resources and technical assistance do communities find useful?
- What was successful, and what could be improved, about the community engagement in the RD&D project?
- How do you identify your community's needs?
- How do you want to engage or be engaged with RD&D projects?
- What was the number one lesson you learned being involved with RD&D projects in your community?

Panelists

- **Introductions, Goals, What to Expect**
  Andrew Barbeau, PICG Project Coordinator
- **Bassett Avocado Advanced Energy Community: Using Data-Driven Approaches to Design Advanced Energy Communities for Existing Buildings (EPC-15-061)**
  David Diaz, Active SGV
- **The Oakland EcoBlock, Phase II: A Zero Net Energy, Low Water-Use Retrofit Neighborhood (EPC-18-013)**
  Dr. Alexandra von Meier, UC Berkeley
- **Pittsburg Unified School District Renewable Energy Plan**
  Matthew Belasco, Pittsburg Unified School District
- **Engaging Communities in the Design of Sustainable Energy and Localized Futures (SELF) Models in California's San Joaquin Valley, the SELF Help Project (EPC-17-048)**
  Daniel Kammen, UC Berkeley
- **Cultural Factors in the Energy Use Patterns of Multifamily Tenants (EPC-14-039)**
  Stephanie Berkland, TRC

Attendees

There were 80 attendees at the first Equity Workstream meeting. Attendees included government entities, utilities, Community Choice Aggregators, non-governmental organizations, research institutions, and industry. Eleven members of CPUC staff and nine members of California Energy Commission staff attended.

Learnings

Learning #1: Community engagement in RD&D should start before site selection.

Every community is unique, and there is more to neighborhood and social dynamics than meets the eye. A consistent theme raised by the panelists throughout the Equity Workstream was that it is critical that community engagement begin prior to doing any

RD&D project in a community. Panelists discussed how most research projects see community engagement as simply an outreach component of a project that is to be completed once a project was already designed and developed. Yet, effective community engagement prior to a project being designed and developed can ensure that a project is successful at gaining community support for, participation in, and benefit from energy programs – a result that is positive for both the researchers and the community

Panelists offered several suggestions for gauging community needs and engaging with communities as partners in the development of electricity RD&D efforts, including:

- Leveraging available energy models and data to develop assessment tools for decision-making related to community resources prior to project launch.
- Creating a two-way relationship between researchers and the community that is focused on education and listening to feedback.
- Establishing organization and governance rules that should be formalized and communicated adequately so that community members have a framework for collaborative and cooperative decision-making after a project has concluded.
- Providing ample time between project meetings and project milestones to allow communities time to understand and discuss complex information.
- Independent professional facilitation and consultation can serve a project well by ensuring key project concepts and benefits are adequately communicated to community members.
- Partnering with local leaders or organizations to use community-specific spatial data, energy models, insights, and surveys to better inform methods of engagement.

Panelists also cautioned that engaging community participants often requires approaching a project in stages, gradually introducing more specificity and complexity over time as a community grows to understand the impacts and implications of projects. This time lag can also lead to participant fatigue, which can occur when there is plenty of talk, but no action. Overall, workstream participants stressed that early engagement establishes strong relationships to enhance project coordination, participation, and community support.

Learning #2. Local credibility and knowledge are vital to community buy-in and project impact.

Communities never benefit from a one size fits all solution for energy programs. This is especially true for communities with no significant history of engagement or organized outreach around energy issues, such as in unincorporated and rural communities. Key

challenges of working with a new community can be magnified by short project timelines and worsened by pre-existing perceptions of local energy organizations. Panelists in this workstream noted that a lack of credibility and knowledge can create community pushback or resistance if residents are not engaged early on and with the right approach. Additionally, outreach can be more difficult when dealing with a variety of community member needs, such as with multifamily tenants. Without having a better understanding of community needs and establishing credibility among key stakeholders, researchers can struggle to gain participation from community members in their efforts.

Project leaders can gain local knowledge by engaging key stakeholders before, during and after the project, demonstrating to community members that they are invested in the community. Panelist David Diaz noted that there is a history of distrust between communities and energy companies, so project leaders need to work with trusted community groups to reach members. By gaining key local knowledge and data before and during a project, RD&D project leaders have a more significant likelihood for success in project engagement.

Presenters proposed some ways to gain increased knowledge of community needs:

- Surveys
    - Use surveying methods that are relatable for community members and use buy-in from trusted partners
        - Use languages commonly spoken among the target audience.
        - Use monetary incentives to engage survey participants.
        - Use trusted local partners to engage community members in surveys.
    - Survey participants in their homes, learn about what energy, health, and economic challenges they face in their home environment, and the types of electricity-related equipment they use.
    - Engage property owners for multifamily projects to gain buy-in from the property decision-maker.
- Community events
- Town-hall dialogues
- Presentations to peers and community members
- Youth engagement and education videos
- Focus groups with small table discussions to cater to multilingual participants
- Continue to pilot and demonstrate best practices through iterative, inclusive community engagement

- Use short, focused tutorials at frequent meetings for conveying technical information
- Provide options to participate in topical working groups

Summary of Opportunities for Collaboration and Coordination

Starting community engagement in RD&D before site selection is challenging, given the timeline of the competitive solicitation process. Upfront engagement by a community takes time and resources, without the guarantee of a project. The California Energy Commission is currently using its Empower Innovation Events to build relationships between communities and researchers. Further, it is using its Empower Innovation Network web platform to help connect potential project partners, by creating a "Places" page where communities can feature potential demonstration sites and highlight the clean energy needs of that location. More engagement with communities and potential RD&D project leaders can help drive partnerships and help communities highlight their needs and opportunities.

Currently, the California Energy Commission solicitation process for EPIC project funding requires projects in low-income and disadvantaged communities include paid community-based organization project partners. The California Energy Commission is seeking to develop accountability measures to ensure projects continue to engage the community-based organization throughout the project timeline, including through periodic check-ins, developing a team of experts that can be consulted on projects, and designating a point person at the Commission for community-based organizations to reach out to regarding project concerns.

Southern California Edison seeks to provide ongoing, hands-on education outreach on clean energy topics and careers in STEM for elementary school, middle school, and high school students in DACs to incrementally build community knowledge on clean energy technology and benefits, and generate excitement about STEM careers in clean tech to build a pipeline of future researchers and community leaders in DACs.

EQUITY MEETING #2

Equity Meeting #2 was held virtually on October 15, 2020 from 4:30-6:00 pm Pacific Standard Time. The meeting focused on EPIC and other RD&D projects and discussed 1) how to communicate with and engage disadvantaged communities prior to project deployment, 2) how the location of the project was selected, and 3) how community members want to engage with RD&D projects.

Equity Meeting #2 had four panelists: from industry, a utility, a unit of local government, and a community group. Their presentations addressed some or all of the following core questions:

- What methods of communication and engagement were used in this community prior to project deployment?
- How was the location(s) of the project selected? What was the community involvement in this process?
- How were technical concepts communicated to the community? Describe the challenges and successes with community engagement?

Panelists

- **Introductions, goals, what to expect**
  Andrew Barbeau, PICG Project Coordinator
- **Richmond Advanced Energy Community Project (EPC-15-076)**
  Amee Raval, Asian Pacific Environmental Network
- **Enabling Affordable Decarbonization (EPC-15-094, EPC-15-053)**
  Ram Narayanamurthy, EPRI
- **The Oakland EcoBlock, Phase II: A Zero Net Energy, Low Water-Use Retrofit Neighborhood (EPC-18-013)**
  Alexandria McBride, City of Oakland
- **Smart City Demo (SCE-E3-P13)**
  Mack W. Knobbe, Prajwal Gautam, SCE

Attendees

There were 64 attendees at the second Equity Workstream meeting representing government entities, utilities, Community Choice Aggregators, transportation electrification technology companies, non-governmental organizations, and researchers. Seven members of CPUC staff, Commissioner Martha Guzman Aceves, and eight members of California Energy Commission staff participated.

Learnings

Learning #3: Community engagement should be used to co-create project goals, and not be seen as a checkbox.

As noted in the first workstream meeting, failing to adequately engage community members before project deployment can lead to project objectives that are misaligned with the needs and opportunities of a community, and lacking community support.

Successful early engagement is about co-creation of project goals, vision, and scope with the community members based on authentic relationships, according to Amee Raval, of APEN. Co-creating project goals in partnership with communities can be challenging and takes the ability to bridge the expertise of communities with those of technical experts. Each has an in-depth understanding of two very different subjects, and yet both perspectives are critical to project success.

Flexibility with project scopes is also critical when engaging communities because inputs or metrics can change based on local conditions or sentiments regarding the proposal. Oftentimes, proposal changes or disagreements among stakeholders are healthy, and a sign that the project is working to have an equitable process that includes diversity of thought.

Panelists involved in the Oakland EcoBlock project noted that input from residents significantly changed the project scope mid-process. Panelists noted this misalignment can emerge due to a lack of time, funding or resources or not identifying the right approach to properly engage community members. Meeting participants also mentioned concerns about lack of engagement early on in the project process, likely due to resident unfamiliarity with the subject matter and distrust with outsiders.

Community-based organizations (CBOs) can serve as great partners for project development and can give critical key insights from the community during the planning phases. CBOs should be compensated as consultants or project partners for that role.

When doing early engagement, presenters recommend to:

- Move away from transactional relationships to partnerships that co-create project objectives and goals.
- Listen and make space for community voices.
- Center racial and social justice values in all project phases.
- Be open to adapting and iterating based on critical feedback.
- Avoid unintended harms such as administrative burdens.

Panelists described the need to develop high standards when onboarding local community partners for engagement by evaluating their capabilities in the following areas:

- Skills and experience of team members
- Duration and history of involvement with target community
- Ability to establish a vision, goals, and desired project outcomes
- Ability to define a clear plan to engage stakeholders
- Ability to facilitate workshops or meetings
- Involvement and comfort level in decision-making
- Involvement with policy advocacy
- Community visibility and credibility through organizational networks, social media, and/or news outlets
- Ability to provide community members with helpful resources and tools

Learning #4: Benefitting a community requires more than simply locating a project there

Panelists noted that just because a project is located in a disadvantaged community, it does not necessarily mean the project is equitable or serves the needs of the community members. In some cases, panelists noted, community members can feel further disenfranchised when a project is being built in their community that they are not aware of or understand and support. There may also be a missed opportunity to have more successful project deployment if the project is deployed in a disadvantaged community yet

is not designed around the need to deliver benefits to those most in need of assistance or support.

The project site selection should be a thoughtful process that not only uses local data to inform technological compatibility, but also uses insights from local leaders to determine fit. Presenters discussed resources and recommendations for project site selection:

- Open-source data like CalEnviroScreen and others, as CalEnviroScreen excludes many tribes.
- Work with local leaders who are writing community plans (many times available online).
- Consider how other funding sources (and their respective goals) play a role in the selection process.
- Compensation for community members (e.g., CBOs as paid consultants)
- Look at established equity models as benchmarks.
- Be intentional about screening local community partners.

Learning #5: Equity, diversity and inclusion in EPIC projects should be measurable.

An equitable process in projects can be difficult to achieve without having thoughtful metrics in place. Meeting participants inquired about ways to measure their success with ensuring a project's process is equitable, and presenters discussed ideas for creating metrics for equitable processes in EPIC projects:

- Use mediators when necessary.
- Closely evaluate failures and implement lessons learned.
- Bring on team members from various academic backgrounds, industries, races, ethnicities, cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds.
- Respect and acknowledge every person's individual contributions to the project.
- Understand and agree on what the desired outcome looks like for communities.
- Understand how your project impacts the local economy and quality of life.
- Consider diversity of thought and evaluate who else is missing from the table.

Summary of Opportunities for Collaboration and Coordination

The California Energy Commission has developed two mechanisms to enhance benefits and ensure accountability for projects proposing to be located in and benefiting disadvantaged communities: scoring criteria that helps to evaluate whether proposals are

poised for strong community benefits, with support and consideration of priorities of the local community. Secondly, tools can help assess project benefits, including economic, environmental, and social benefits. Evaluation and assessment of these tools used in the California Energy Commission's EPIC procurement process could help maximize low-income and disadvantaged community benefits in projects.

Further, the California Energy Commission is looking to develop a map to identify community-based organizations working in and with low-income and disadvantaged communities.

EQUITY MEETING #3

Equity Meeting #3 was held virtually on December 3, 2020 from 4:30-6:00 pm Pacific Standard Time. The meeting invited project administrators to provide an overview of opportunities and mechanisms for Disadvantaged Communities to engage in RD&D and EPIC projects, and a presentation from the Greenlining Institute discussing key learnings from the Greenlining Racial Equity Research Report, published in in September 2020.

Equity Meeting #3 had three panelists: a utility, a state agency, and a nonprofit organization. Their presentations addressed some or all of the following core questions:

- What are some existing pathways for researchers, community-based organizations, and companies to engage in partnership-based RD&D?
- What are the typical challenges to building equitable, partnership-based research?
- What are some best practices, recommendations, and resources for researchers, funders, and communities to use in building equitable, partnership-based research?

Panelists

- **Introductions, goals, what to expect**
  Andrew Barbeau, PICG Project Coordinator
- **EMPOWER Innovation Platform**
  Erik Stokes, California Energy Commission
- **Advancing the Well-Being of Our Communities Through Collaboration**
  Renee Cinar, Southern California Edison
- **Making Racial Equity Real in Research**
  Hana Creger, Greenlining Institute

Attendees

There were 62 attendees at the third Equity Workstream meeting representing government entities, utilities, Community Choice Aggregators, transportation electrification technology companies, non-governmental organizations, and researchers. Seven members of CPUC staff, nine members of California Energy Commission staff, and representatives from the California Air Resources Board participated.

Learnings

Learning #6: Equitable research can also be achieved through improved assessments, solicitations, and funding structures.

Third party assessments can help identify how funds are being utilized and how they are (or are not) benefitting disadvantaged communities. Without these assessments, it is difficult to identify where the gaps are and how project leaders can improve the reach and impact in disadvantaged communities. More importantly, once funds have been allocated, it is imperative that funders consider carefully how they can solicit diverse researchers, as well as extend funders' impact in vulnerable communities. This type of assessment, coupled with thoughtful solicitation, can lead to increased investment in DACs.

Solicitation strategies can also include targeted incentives that can spur much needed investment in disadvantaged communities from local developers and technology companies. For example, the CEC encouraged technology/project developers to seek out project sites in vulnerable communities by identifying upfront their requirement to locate projects in DACs and providing incentive/bonus points for investing in DACs. Further examination can be done of project match requirements, which can unfairly hinder the development of beneficial projects in communities unable to come up with their own funding.

Stakeholders throughout the EPIC Policy + Innovation Coordination Group efforts have consistently described how a lack of awareness and access to energy programs is a significant hurdle to achieving equitable outcomes. In RD&D programs, funders can create new partnerships with clean energy entrepreneurs, incubator and accelerator programs, and testing facilities, by requiring minimum levels of funding to be allocated to underrepresented groups. These types of programs can sometimes even qualify for Federal support to help expand entrepreneurial assistance across various geographic locations and businesses. Program leaders are also encouraged to provide start-up companies with specific diversity and inclusion training as they recruit employees and scale their business.

- Links to more information on funding opportunities:
    - CalSEED
    - Empower Innovation Platform

Learning #7: Early engagement strategies should be tailored to meet specific needs for each community.

It is common for project leaders to treat communities and community members as a secondary concern to their technology or programmatic goals. In community engagement, panelists described project leaders not prioritizing community needs and talking past residents, which can make community members feel the information they are receiving is either irrelevant to their interests or overwhelming to understand. Often, community members don't know what EPIC is or what the expectations are for their involvement in RD&D projects. Sometimes a lack of early and thoughtful engagement can hurt project outcomes, so it is critical to plan for longer lead times for project/technology developers and communities to build relationships.

Presenters provided several recommendations for engaging communities in effective and creative ways:

- Develop scoring criteria to better assess the potential for projects to benefit DACs and low-income communities.
- Require that a CBO is a paid part of the project team. Work closely with them to align on common goals.
- Provide adequate training for project staff to understand how to evaluate projects for whether they are achieving equity goals.
- Provide constituents with adequate information "at their finger-tips" such as a centralized system for participation opportunities, or visibility into the technology solutions provider.
- Host events with targeted training on how to become part of a project, and what that participation entails.
- Help communities looking for technology-based solutions to support a community project by creating a directory of technology solutions, services, and organizations to potentially partner with.
- Provide communities with supportive feedback on proposed project concepts.
- Develop and manage clean energy working groups to facilitate long-term collaboration and strategic community engagement.
- Research institutions and funders should understand how funding structures can undercut engagement and involvement, such as by limiting the ability of a project leader to subcontract with community-based organizations.
- Ensure there is adequate technical assistance for communities throughout the project. Create criteria and evaluate the effectiveness of the technical assistance.
- Researchers should establish long-term trust with communities they wish to study.

Links to more information

- Making Racial Equity Real in Research
- SCE's Clean Energy Access Working Group

Learning #8: Project leaders and researchers should engage CBOs as paid project partners to ensure equitable research.

Despite more available funding for research related to equity, the research fields need more equity training expertise to avoid research practices that can be inadequate, extractive, or culturally insensitive. One of the key issues identified was that community partners are often sought after to provide insights and input on equity and community expertise but are not compensated as advisors for that critical work, shifting the power dynamics entirely to the project leaders. Presenter Hana Creger noted that she often hears that community organizations are told that project leaders are limited in the amount of funds they can subcontract or grant out by their funders. Hana recommended that project funders remove such barriers in funding and challenge restrictive policies for proper compensation.

Hana Creger further commented that the same community-based organizations are often called upon again and again to provide input related to equity on projects and other initiatives, often without compensation. Panelists noted a need to build the capacity and expertise of community leaders, and support them to lead their own research, collaborate on research partnerships, and hold researchers accountable.

CBOs play a critical role in equitable research, but project leaders usually do not understand how to evaluate them for partnerships to ensure they are properly prioritizing the needs of the community. Presenters discussed some ways to evaluate CBOs:

- Rely on key local government officials to refer project leaders to the best CBOs in their community.
- Reach out to other local community partners to provide reviews and recommendations.
- Links to more information
    - Clean Mobility Options
    - Sustainable Transportation Equity Project (STEP)

In their Report “Making Racial Equity Real in Research,” the Greenlining Institute recommends a systematic approach to equitable, partnership-based research:

- Understand the context of racism in past and present research.
- Review the challenges, best practices, and opportunities for centering racial equity in research.
- Conduct an equity assessment of your research institution, department, or team.
- Partner with and pay a community partner.
- Co-create the research questions and scope of work with a community partner.

Summary of Opportunities for Collaboration and Coordination

Early engagement with communities remains a challenge, and more work is needed to empower communities have a leadership role identifying their own needs and opportunities that can be addressed through RD&D efforts. In particular, EPIC project funding timelines, the competitive bid process, and a lack of technical assistance for early community engagement and planning, remain obstacles to most early engagement. Technical assistance and capacity building support are not currently able to be funded within EPIC.

The California Energy Commissioner, the California Public Utilities Commission, and other stakeholders, should explore the obstacles to community engagement and participation in the EPIC program, and discuss the opportunity, need, and potential structure of a technical assistance component of the EPIC program to empower more community participation.

EQUITY FRAMEWORK

FOR EPIC PROGRAM RD&D PROJECTS

The Equity Workstream of the EPIC Policy + Innovation Coordination Group established a goal of incorporating input from EPIC project leaders on best practices and recommendations for equitable engagement with Disadvantaged Communities within the EPIC program's efforts. The included framework below represents summary recommendations from the participants in the Policy + Innovation Coordination Group Equity Workstream for the EPIC Program Administrators and EPIC Program Participants and Partners, in their execution of the EPIC Program.

A) **Engage communities now.** RD&D project leaders should engage and support disadvantaged communities now, prior to asking anything from the community.
    a) Set the Vision
        i) Center racial and social justice values in all project phases.
        ii) Create a two-way relationship between researchers and community that is focused on education and listening to feedback.
        iii) Move away from transactional relationships to partnerships that co-create project objectives and goals.
        iv) Provide adequate training for project staff to understand how to evaluate projects for whether they are achieving equity goals.
    b) Gather Data
        i) Develop assessment tools for community decision-making before a project launch.
        ii) Partner with local leaders or organizations to use any community-specific spatial data, energy models, insights, and surveys available to better inform their methods of engagement. Look at open-source data like CalEnviroScreen and others, as CalEnviroScreen excludes many tribes.
        iii) Work with local leaders who are leading or have led community planning efforts.
        iv) Consider how other funding sources (and their respective goals) play a role in the selection process.
        v) Look at established equity models as benchmarks.
        vi) Be intentional about screening local community partners.

c) Communicate and Engage
    i) Listen and make space for community voices.
    ii) Establish governance rules about how a project is organized and how decisions are made that should be formalized and communicated adequately.
    iii) Avoid unintended harms such as administrative burdens for community members or partners.
    iv) Consider using independent professional facilitation and consultation to ensure key project concepts and benefits are adequately communicated to community members.
    v) Facilitate community surveys:
        (1) Use languages commonly spoken among the target audience.
        (2) Use monetary incentives to engage survey participants.
        (3) Use simple survey methods and gain buy-in and work with trusted partners.
        (4) Survey participants in their homes, learn about what energy, health, and economic challenges they face in their home environment, and the types of electricity-related equipment they use.
        (5) Engage property owners for multifamily projects to gain buy-in from the property decision-maker.

B) Build community capacity to lead. Support the ability of communities to identify solutions for and lead efforts to address their own challenges and opportunities.

a) Provide capacity building and technical assistance to under-resourced community partners to apply for research grants.
b) Foster conversations with community partners, residents, and other stakeholders to understand their research needs.
c) Advocate for research skill development as a form of capacity building in conversations with funders.
d) Identify community organizations' gaps in research skill sets and seek research partners who can provide complementary research skills and tools.
e) Request assistance from research institutions and researchers to advise the development of community organizations' in-house research, provide feedback, or build specific technical expertise.

f) Request training, capacity building, and technical assistance from researchers and their institutions to develop the research skills, methodologies, and tools community organizations lack, in order to create self-sufficiency for future research projects.
g) Consider hiring researchers or Ph.D. candidates from underrepresented backgrounds who hold specific expertise or skill sets related to the research project.

C) Reform funding structures, develop CBOs as partners. Restructure funding opportunities to encourage the engagement of community-based organizations as paid partners and leaders.

a) Evaluate funding and solicitation structures to ensure adequate funding for paid partnerships throughout the life of the project.
b) Form a partnership with an equity or community-based organization that will foster a mutually beneficial research relationship.
    i) Carefully evaluate partnerships and rely on key local jurisdictions and community members to recommend strong CBOs.
    ii) Develop a Memorandum of Understanding or Collaborative Stakeholder Structure that describes the governance, organization, and financial relationships of all partners involved in the project.
    iii) Co-create research questions and the scope of work with CBOs.
    iv) Commit to staying in partnership throughout the entire research process, from project scoping to the dissemination of findings.

D) Actively engage a community throughout a project. Effective community engagement is not a one-time or short-term activity and should be meaningful throughout the full life cycle of a project.

a) Provide ample time between project meetings and project milestones to allow communities time to understand and discuss complex information.
b) Host events with targeted training on how to participate.
c) Facilitate additional surveys, host community events, and town-hall dialogues.
d) Develop youth engagement and education videos.
e) Host focus groups with small table discussions that cater to multilingual participants.
f) Continue to pilot and demonstrate best practices through iterative, inclusive community engagement.

g) Use short, focused tutorials at frequent meetings for conveying technical information.
h) Provide options to participate in topical working groups.
i) Support communities looking for technology-based solutions to support a community project by creating a directory of technology solutions, services, and organizations to potentially partner with.
j) Ensure there is adequate technical assistance throughout the project to help communities understand and evaluate complex topics; create criteria and evaluate the effectiveness of the technical assistance.
k) Most importantly, be open to adapting and iterating based on critical feedback.

E) Ensure long-term commitment and tracking after project is done. Plan and implement each project for the long term to ensure that community participants aren't left with stranded assets after a project is complete.

a) Develop a long-term plan for the maintenance and operation of any equipment as part of initial project development objectives.
b) Designate community leaders to collect and raise any issues that emerge.
c) Coordinate a project debrief when a project is nearing completion to review project metrics, and to evaluate what a project was able to accomplish.
d) Store project information in an accessible location as a longer-term archive.
e) Maintain a relationship with the community and check in with the community over time to solicit concerns or issues that may have arisen.
f) Create a directory of technology solutions, services, and organizations for communities to use as a resource after a project is completed.

Acknowledgements: The EPIC Policy + Innovation Coordination Group would like to acknowledge the work of the Greenlining Institute, a public policy, research, and advocacy non-profit organization based in Oakland, California, for its work in developing and distributing its report *Making Racial Equity Real in Research* in September 2020 that outlined the results of extensive work on the topic of equity in applied, policy-oriented research.

APPENDICES

Equity Workstream Meeting 1:

Video Recording:
https://vimeo.com/465878804

Transcript:
https://epicpartnership.org/resources/Equity_Meeting_1_Transcript.pdf

Spanish Translation:
https://epicpartnership.org/resources/Equity_Meeting_1_Spanish_Translation.pdf

David Diaz (Bassett Avocado Advanced Energy Community) Presentation:
https://epicpartnership.org/resources/Diaz_PICG_Equity_Workstream_1.pdf

Sascha von Meier (UC Berkeley) Presentation:
https://epicpartnership.org/resources/von_Meier_PICG_Equity_Workstream_1.pdf

Matt Belasco (Pittsburg Unified School District) Presentation:
https://epicpartnership.org/resources/Belasco_PICG_Equity_Workstream_1.pdf

Daniel Kammen (UC Berkeley) Presentation:
https://epicpartnership.org/resources/Kammen_PICG_Equity_Workstream_1-2.pdf

Stephanie Berkland (TRC Engineers, Inc.) Presentation:
https://epicpartnership.org/resources/Berkland_PICG_Equity_Workstream_1.pdf

Equity Workstream Meeting 2:

Video Recording:
https://vimeo.com/469024796

Transcript:
https://epicpartnership.org/resources/Equity_Workstream_2_English_Transcript.pdf

Spanish Translation:
https://epicpartnership.org/resources/Equity_Workstream_2_Spanish_Transcript.pdf

Amee Raval (Asian Pacific Environmental Network) Presentation:
https://epicpartnership.org/resources/Raval_PICG_Equity_Workstrem_2.pdf

Ram Narayanamurthy (EPRI) Presentation:
https://epicpartnership.org/resources/Narayanamurthy_PICG_Equity_Workstrem_2.pdf

Alexandria McBride (City of Oakland) Presentation:
https://epicpartnership.org/resources/McBride_PICG_Equity_Workstrem_2.pdf

Mack W. Knobbe, Prajwal Gautam (SCE) Presentation:
https://epicpartnership.org/resources/Knobbe_Goutam_PICG_Equity_Workstrem_2.pdf

Equity Workstream Meeting 3:

Video Recording:
https://vimeo.com/487285129

Transcript:
https://epicpartnership.org/resources/Equity_Workstream_3_English_Transcript.pdf

Spanish Translation:
https://epicpartnership.org/resources/Equity_Workstream_3_Spanish_Transcript.pdf

Erik Stokes (California Energy Commission) Presentation:
https://epicpartnership.org/resources/Stokes_PICG_Equity_Workstream_3.pdf

Renee Cinar (SCE) Presentation:
https://epicpartnership.org/resources/Cinar_PICG_Equity_Workstream_3.pdf

Hana Creger (Greenlining Institute) Presentation:
https://epicpartnership.org/resources/Creger_PICG_Equity_Workstream_3.pdf