



LEADING WITH EQUITY

Recommendations for State Decision Makers to Advance Energy Equity

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ACEEE's Leading with Equity Initiative

Too many Americans, who already face rising costs for transportation and other necessities, are struggling to pay their energy bills because they live in inefficient buildings. At the state level, decision makers—including state energy offices, state policymakers, and utility commissions—can address this problem and make substantial progress toward advancing an equitable energy future. We created this document to help these actors make comprehensive energy-saving services accessible to communities of color and low-income communities, as well as to better include disinvested communities in their decision making.

The following recommendations were informed by ACEEE’s [Leading with Equity](#) initiative. This effort convenes community-based organizations (CBOs) and advocates to ensure that [the communities most negatively impacted by the energy system](#) are helping to drive development of improved equity-related metrics in ACEEE’s energy efficiency and clean energy scorecards, as well as to drive changes in our other research. Here, these experts share ways that decision makers can take action and make the changes necessary to build an equitable energy future (figure 1).

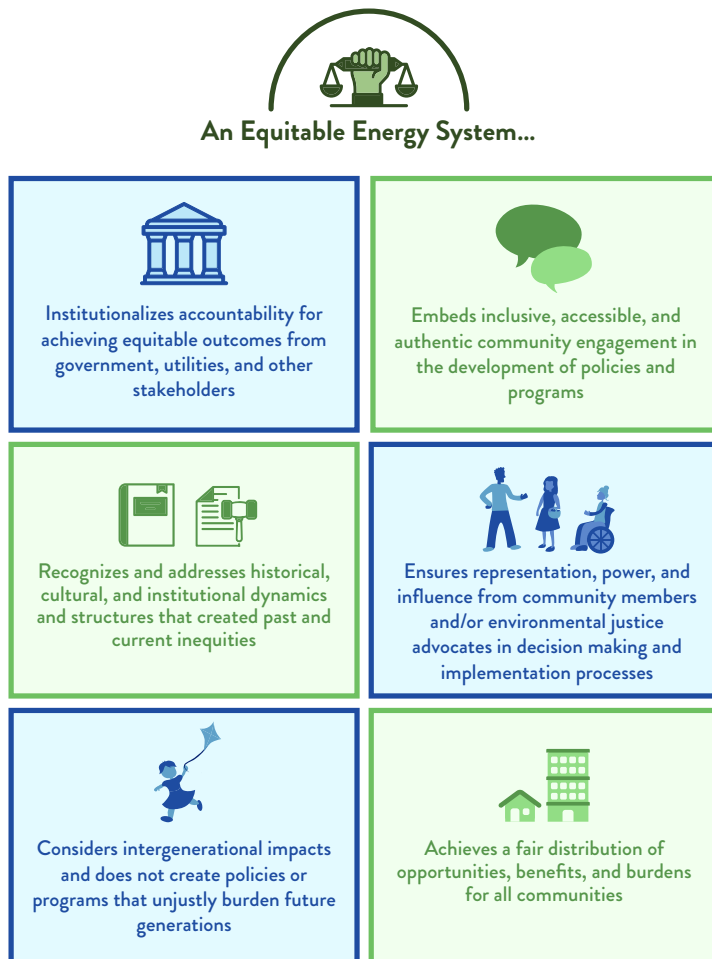


Figure 1. Identifying an equitable energy system

Findings: Recommendations for States

State decision makers play a critical role in addressing the inequities that have left too many communities—especially low-income communities and communities of color—with high energy burdens, inconsistent energy service access, and high exposure to polluting energy infrastructure. CBO participants recommend that utility commissions, state energy offices, and policymakers take the following actions to advance a more equitable energy future at the state level:



Prioritize robust community engagement and allow disinvested communities to drive decisions. To do this successfully, states should consider details such as mechanisms, times, locations, and fair compensation for engagement; ensure that residents are being reached in a culturally competent way; and proactively reach out to community members to ensure that there are no significant barriers to prevent vulnerable communities from receiving services and information. These efforts should be undertaken in collaboration with other agencies to streamline the workload and make efficient use of participants’ time and expertise.



Set and use clear definitions for goals and the targeted residents—and make the goals ambitious. When setting program goals or targeting efforts to particular groups of residents, clearly state the definitions your organization is using and base them on community input. For example, avoid setting a goal to serve “marginalized” households without clearly stating which households fall under that designation. Use [environmental justice screening tools](#) to align your work with best practices.



Make decisions based on local context. For example, base your language accessibility efforts on the languages spoken in the target area. Use community engagement as a tool to gather relevant information.



Track and clearly state the non-energy benefits of your programs. Instead of aiming to generate unspecified co-benefits, define the benefits (such as reduced asthma rates or more high-quality jobs) in coordination with community members and use metrics to monitor progress (or partner with other entities to do so).



Monitor the distribution of your programs' costs and benefits across groups. This should include tracking how much of your spending goes directly to serving and benefiting residents, and the distribution of energy savings for disinvested communities.



Embed accountability, including benchmarks, metrics, and evaluations, into your processes. Make clear and concrete commitments, using metrics that community members understand. For example, set a specific goal for energy affordability or program participation (e.g., reducing energy burden by a particular amount or achieving a defined participation rate in a rental efficiency program); clearly state how it will be measured; monitor changes over time; and adjust your approach based on results. Also, share results publicly and transparently, even if you are not on track to meet your goals. Such sharing builds trust with residents and helps accurately track progress.



To streamline program accessibility, **attempt to auto-enroll vulnerable customers into energy efficiency programs and favorable rate plans using thresholds for other means-tested services, or allow enrollment services by other agencies.** For example, states can allow people enrolled in federal programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), to automatically enroll in their energy efficiency programs. Engaging with community members and CBOs can help to ensure that the developed process reduces barriers.



Include program measures to reduce health and safety deferrals from the start. This will help ensure that the program includes—rather than excludes—the households that can most benefit from energy efficiency programs.



Make an explicit effort to target the particular needs of multifamily properties. This effort might include offering program carve-outs for multifamily properties.



Reduce the possibility of displacement due to energy efficiency upgrades. Such upgrades can lead to increased housing costs and rents; to avoid this, states can set [policies](#) and pursue [approaches](#) that address gentrification and preserve residents' ability to stay in their homes and communities. States can develop these policies and approaches in coordination with community members.



When including households with moderate incomes in a program's goals, **acknowledge the differences in resources between moderate- and low-income households and set program structures and budgets accordingly.**



When taking actions to increase equitable access to efficient transportation, **be sure to prioritize the reduction of air, water, and noise pollution and improved safety for the most vulnerable communities throughout project planning.**