

Fostering Equity in Local Clean Energy Policy

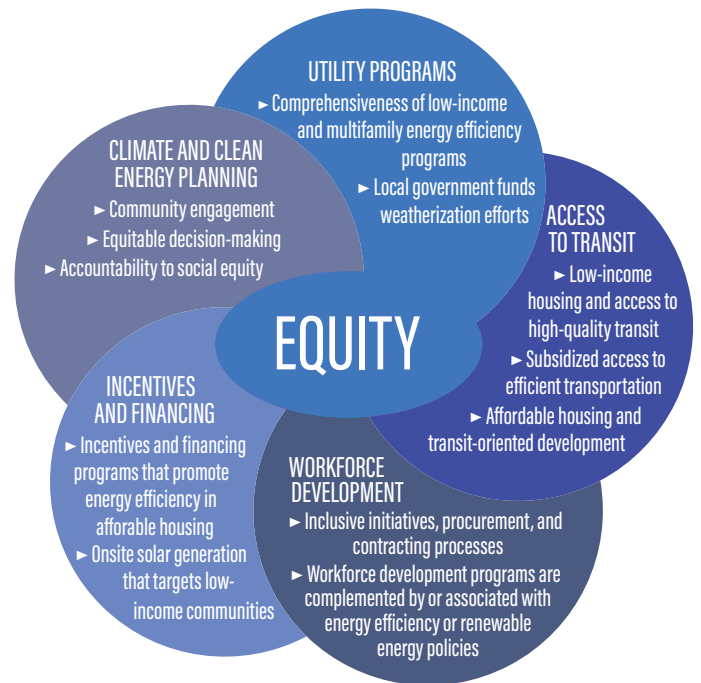
Lessons from the 2019 City Clean Energy Scorecard

For local governments, prioritizing social equity in clean energy strategies begins with identifying groups historically underserved by energy efficiency and renewable energy investments, the disparate impacts of current policies, and who is poised to have a voice in future policy design and implementation. These concerns guide ACEEE's work in supporting local communities working to advance social equity through clean energy initiatives. Historically, many marginalized groups have been underserved, overlooked, and underrepresented in local clean energy planning and policymaking. These groups can vary from place to place but often include people of color, low-income residents, older adults, indigenous peoples, immigrants, people with disabilities, and people experiencing homelessness.

Equitable clean energy plans, policies, and programs can help address four main challenges facing marginalized communities:

- » **History of exclusion from clean energy initiatives:** Marginalized communities have not been considered or included in past clean energy planning and policymaking. Consequently, many of the same people who would benefit most from such initiatives are overlooked when policies are developed, implemented and evaluated.
- » **High energy burdens:** Low-income households, communities of color, older adults, and renters all face disproportionately high energy burdens, meaning they spend more of their income on energy bills compared to their counterparts.
- » **Underrepresentation in the workforce:** Women and black Americans make up a disproportionately small share of both the energy efficiency and renewable energy workforces.
- » **Inadequate transportation systems:** Many marginalized communities find themselves increasingly cut-off from efficient, affordable, and reliable transit systems. Residents of these neighborhoods often lack access to automobiles, and those that do have cars are likely to experience high and unpredictable transportation cost burdens.

ACEEE's 2019 City Clean Energy Scorecard uses five dimensions (see graphic below) to evaluate how cities and their local utilities are creating, promoting, and supporting socially equitable clean energy strategies.



Below, we identify 4 priority opportunities for local governments to expand their work on equitable clean energy initiatives, and we summarize how cities across the country are setting examples for others to follow.

Prioritize and pursue equitable approaches to clean energy planning and implementation

In the last few years, a small but growing number of cities have stepped up to address the often-overlooked needs and interests of their marginalized residents when planning and implementing clean energy policies. Most are taking a first step by establishing internal protocols or metrics that evaluate the degree to which policy and program outcomes are equitable. Some are working to ensure that marginalized groups are prioritized in community engagement and have a role in the decision making that affects the creation or implementation of a clean energy plan.

The City of Providence, RI has created a Racial and Environmental Justice Committee. The Committee, whose members all represent marginalized communities, has been leading the city's climate action plan stakeholder engagement efforts while also guiding city sustainability staff as they incorporate and evaluate equity in the city's ongoing sustainability work.

Incentivize energy efficiency and renewable energy for low-income homes

Cities pursuing low-income clean energy policies and programs usually do so with dual goals of lowering energy burdens while also preserving or expanding housing affordability. These initiatives typically take one of three forms. First, programs aimed at improving new and existing buildings provide clean energy and housing affordability incentives or low-interest financing to property owners of certain building types that are home to low-income households. For example, a program could focus on small multifamily properties or owner-occupied single-family homes. Second, place-based programs offer similar incentives and financing but restrict eligibility to those in communities of color or low-income neighborhoods. Third, some cities are also integrating clean energy requirements and incentives in comprehensive housing policies that govern the work of multiple city agencies, often adopting a mix of building-focused and place-based approaches.

The City of Milwaukee, WI took a place-based approach in providing energy efficiency funding to low-income neighborhoods. The city's Neighborhood Development Corporation offers a mix of payback, deferred, and forgivable loans to make energy efficiency, health, safety, and structural improvements to low-income homes located in the city's Targeted Investment Neighborhoods.

Develop an inclusive clean-energy workforce

Women, minorities, veterans, and other marginalized groups have historically faced barriers to participating and thriving in the energy efficiency and renewable

energy industries. Inclusive workforce development initiatives focus on rectifying these inequities by creating new economic and educational opportunities for these specific groups. While some cities adopt policies that prioritize women-, minority-, and veteran-owned businesses when awarding local government contracts to install energy efficiency and renewable energy resources, some are going further with specific training opportunities to bring marginalized groups into the clean energy workforce.

In 2017, the City of Boston, MA adopted requirements that any private or public construction project over 50,000 square feet in size must employ substantial numbers of people of color and women for apprentice and journey person positions. These requirements extend to projects making energy efficiency improvements or installing renewable energy systems.

Increase low-income access to affordable, reliable, and clean transportation options

A growing number of cities are pursuing policies and programs that aim to increase low-income access to affordable and reliable transportation options that generate few, if any, greenhouse gas emissions. Many are incentivizing or requiring the creation of affordable housing in transit-oriented developments (TOD). Others are lowering transit system fares for low-income riders and providing discounted subscriptions to bike- or scooter-sharing networks. A few cities are developing incentives and infrastructure to support electric vehicle car-sharing options for low-income neighborhoods.

The City of Phoenix, AZ offers incentives that lower construction costs for affordable housing developers in TOD locations and encourage other developers to preserve some affordable TOD housing units specifically for those with low incomes. The city also provides discounts for low-income transit and bikeshare users. Today, 60% of the city's low-income neighborhoods have access to all-day high-quality transit.

Contact [Stefen Samarripas](#) for more information on ACEEE's equitable policy research and technical assistance opportunities for local governments, utilities, and community-based organizations.

Visit [ACEEE's State and Local Policy Database](#) for more information on local government clean energy initiatives

