Equity and Energy Efficiency

A USDN Innovation Fund 2015 Grant

USDN's Innovation Fund granted $95,000 – in part with funding from the Kendeda Fund and Kresge Foundation – to enable Southeast Sustainability Directors Network (SSDN) members Atlanta, Charlotte, Durham, Fayetteville, Huntsville AL, Knoxville, Memphis, and Sarasota County to build capacity to address equity in Energy Efficiency (EE) programming through training, a toolkit of resources, and technical assistance. While this project is focused on EE programing, it will establish foundational knowledge to help sustainability directors incorporate equity goals into the design and implementation of other sustainability programs and initiatives. The project will be complete in December 2016.

Working with the Southeast Energy Efficiency Alliance (SEEA) and the Partnership for Southern Equity (PSE), this project team is focusing primarily on actionable methods for introducing equitable decision making into city program design, implementing programs that systematize equity, and tracking the effectiveness of programs with equity goals. Core deliverables are centered around four primary objectives: (1) Probe Existing Regional EE Programs, (2) Build SSDN Member Capacity, (3) Develop Consistent Methodologies, and (4) Promote Productive Stakeholder Engagement.

Project Activities

- **Task 1** *Probe Existing Regional EE Programs.* PSE and SEEA are conducting an assessment of current EE programs in SSDN communities to determine how existing program models are / are not equitable and identify regional and national best practices that may be transferable to SSDN communities. This research is being conducted through surveys, interviews, and evaluations of available program performance data.

- **Task 2** Build SSDN Member Capacity. Working with PSE, SEEA is developing and conducting equity and diversity training to teach SSDN members about: (1) Cultural contexts and history, including how underlying inequalities have negatively impacted vulnerable populations, (2) Established definitions/principles of equity and shared prosperity, (3) How to use an equity framework when analyzing EE programs, and (4) Overview of best practices and available tools and resources for engaging and elevating vulnerable populations.

  - o **Deliverable 1.** In-person training for city sustainability staff at the 2016 SSDNAnnual Meeting in Atlanta GA in April.

- **Task 3** *Develop Consistent Methodologies.* Data gathered in Task 1, as well as expertise provided by PSE and SEEA, will inform creation of a workbook that will explore: (1) How do existing EE programs or policies in the southeast address (or fail to address) equity issues? (2) Given this understanding and framing, how can local governments most effectively develop performance measures that incorporate equity goals as key indicators when implementing EE programs? (3) What are the priorities and best practices in program design and community engagement that SSDN cities and partners can employ to increase EE equity in the southeast? (4) How can local governments best frame equity goals with utilities, lawmakers, business leaders, and other EE industry stakeholders in ways that are sensitive to local and regional dynamics?

  - o **Deliverable 2.** Equity Workbook available to any city or stakeholder, to be hosted on the SSDN and USDN websites. The workbook will include: (1) PowerPoint profile of how low-income residents are currently benefiting (or not) from existing EE programs in the southeast, (2) case studies of opportunities to improve the equity of the energy efficiency landscape in the region, and (3) specific recommendations for project cities on how to partner effectively in unique circumstances to realize those opportunities.

- **Task 4** *Promote Productive Stakeholder Engagement.* Participating cities commit to convene local partners and utilize the Equity Workbook to explore opportunities to improve equity outcomes in local EE programs and initiatives. SEEA / PSE will provide collaborative support and technical assistance as needed in order to help cities initiate and facilitate conversations with local stakeholders. This includes developing a Consortium Kit to help cities convene and facilitate local partners that may not typically work together on EE programs. Additionally, PSE / SEEA will provide hands-on technical assistance to Tier 1 cities (as requested) to support local efforts to advance equity and EE work, including: (1) Connecting cities directly with regional partners' support and technical assistance, and (2) Determining and building specific leadership capacity / community engagement strategies.

  - o **Deliverable 3.** Consortium Kit will be available to any city or stakeholder, to be hosted on the SSDN and USDN websites, including: (1) PowerPoint to help cities lead partners through the Equity Workbook, and (2) communications templates and examples for cities to copy and use in their own program, such as invitations, meeting agendas, or background summaries.