

Equitable Energy Transformation

Making Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Accessible

When communities realize that retrofits and renewables can be inaccessible to some community members, they mobilize to understand why, and what can be done to change this.

Too often, the people most vulnerable to climate change have the least access to resources that can mitigate climate risks. Because of this, programming sustainability efforts from an equity perspective has become a much more common practice in recent years. Energy transformation through renewable energy implementation and energy-saving building retrofits are often only accessible to those in higher income brackets. To address this disparity, the USDN Innovation Fund and the Partners for Places grant funds have supported projects that focus on bringing equity into energy system transformation. This article highlights the recent work of these funds in this area.

Updating Policies for Energy Efficiency in New Construction.

To bridge the income gap and ensure that all Berkeley residents have access to renewable energy sources, the City of Berkeley partnered with The San Francisco Foundation and The East Bay Community Foundation to provide solar installations for low-income communities. The project resulted in 13.96 kilowatts of solar installed on a low-income multi-family building and single family home, and 19 green job seekers trained through two cohorts of advanced training provided by Rising Sun Energy Center (Rising Sun) and GRID Alternatives (GRID).

In Ithaca NY, the city partnered with The Park Foundation to make Ithaca more energy efficient by evaluating policy tools that can be used to incentivize or mandate green building standards for new construction. The cost of living in the area was of major concern to local officials, so the project focused on creating more equitable and inclusive policy measures. The biggest social impacts of this work are related to the affordability of sustainable new construction. An in-depth social impacts study was incorporated into the larger study, to identify whether the standards being considered increased the cost of construction, ownership, or rental. This study also explored whether any mechanism exists to ensure that the benefits, such as reduced utility costs, were being passed on to tenants.

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Building Capacity for Equity in Energy Efficiency.



Image from SSDN Energy and Equity Project Website

In 2015, USDN's Innovation Fund granted an award to the City of Knoxville TN, to explore *Innovation in Equity and Energy Efficiency in the Southeast*. Through this project, the Southeast Sustainability Directors Network (SSDN) collaborated with the Southeast Energy Efficiency Alliance (SEEA) and the Partnership for Southern Equity (PSE). The intent was to build the capacity of SSDN members to integrate meaningful equity considerations into municipal sustainability policies and practices - particularly in energy efficiency (EE) programming. A curated toolkit of web-based content lives [here](#).

Continuing in this vein, the City of Burlington VT was recently awarded a technical assistance mini-grant to support proposal development for an equitable energy transformation project being submitted to the 2017 USDN Innovation Fund RFP. This concept builds on previous equitable energy work and intends to focus on the challenge of the growing disparity between people of low and modest income (LMI) and their more affluent neighbors in accessing and participating in energy innovations and transformation. The proposing project team (consisting of Burlington VT; Detroit MI; Fort Collins CO; Oakland CA; and Sacramento CA) plans to address several levers of influence including literature around equity and sustainability, and program experience from various peers.