

ECEE Member Survey Findings

Common Themes and Lessons Learned

ECEE Mission Statement

Identify new approaches and tools to address equity issues for at-risk communities during the transition to a clean energy economy.

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www.eceecollaborative.com*

Survey Findings Purpose Statement

On June 14th, 2021, the Equity in the Clean Energy Economy Collaborative launched its first member survey. To date, there have been 240 respondents, approximately 80% of the Collaborative. The survey remains open for new members to fill out. This deck is an analysis of the responses so far, and the lessons learned from the Collaborative's members.

Background

The purpose of the survey was three-fold:

1. Capture personal perceptions and organizational practices on equity issues
2. Organize members into work groups that will help guide the Collaborative's research
3. Collect input on research topics as they relate to the six work tracks

Equity can be difficult to define, as it depends on the perspective of the person or organization. The ability to capture and share the perspectives of so many people is important for identifying common traits in varying definitions as well as recognizing blind spots.

Although there were common themes and terminology, no clear-cut definition of equity emerged



Question 1: How do you personally define "equity" in the context of the clean energy economy?

CLEAN
ENERGY
TRANSITION

EQUITY

ACCESS/SELF-DETERMINATION

OPPORTUNITY

JUSTICE

INCLUSION/FAIRNESS

Themes – Defining Equity

Access/Self-determination

- “Equity is to provide the structures and resources so that peoples most impacted by the clean energy economy are centered at the decision making.”

Opportunity

- “Equity is the opportunity for "all" stakeholders and participants to drive equal value, resources, and options on a common basis to meet their specific needs.”

Justice

- “Clean Energy equity is the process of bringing about justice in the economic participation in the clean energy system while also rectifying financial, negative community, and well-being burdens on those chronically harmed by the energy system.”

Inclusion/Fairness

- “Fair and just; that all customers benefit from the clean energy economy.”

Defining Equity – Select Verbatims

“Equity means a real opportunity at access. Equity also means fully understanding the impact of policies and programs upon different populations and customers segments so they are designed in a way with an awareness of unintended consequences and an unintended overbenefit to one population group.”

“Ensuring that all communities benefit from investments in a clean energy future. Paying particular attention to communities historically shut out and harmed by past and current policies, and considering means to redress and repair those relationships. Ensuring local agency and control over every aspect of the energy economy, from extraction to generation to transmission & distribution infrastructure and consumption.”

“I define equity as an intentional effort to rectify historical disadvantages (redlining, environmental harm, etc.) through both policy efforts and procedural efforts. It is different than "fairness," which may unintentionally support institutional racism and other inequities by attempting to treat everyone the same way. This is personal rather than an agency position, but is reflective of the State of Colorado's equity, diversity, and inclusion policies.”

“Beyond the narrow economics conception based on cost allocation to a broader social conception that considers fairness and addresses persistent structural inequity and injustice.”

Findings - Defining Equity

Defining equity led to a variety of responses, even within themes

Not all fell neatly into any of the four themes

“Access/Self-determination” was the largest theme, “Opportunity” the smallest

The ambiguity of the word is a challenge itself that will need to be resolved

The identified common themes, and any in the future that might be identified, is a good starting point for a common definition of the word

Two Paths to Fairness: Equality vs. Equity

Fairness



Equality:
the state of
being equal

Equity:
the quality of
being fair and
impartial

Utility regulation tends to emphasize **equality** as the path to fairness

“Treat all consumers the same”

Equity is a more qualitative notion

“Equity requires an understanding of differences among consumers”

Equity vs. Equality (continued)

- The heart of the matter is each state's definition of fairness in the process of "rate setting" (tariffs). Some states allow regulatory commissioner some discretion to allow experimentation; other states have inflexible statutes that define fairness
- One tariff for an entire residential class of customers means that the median customer should be well served. Customers who are far from the median are not served as well
- Quotes from 2019 interviews with utility executives

"It's 'regulation to the middle' that causes problems for the outliers."

"The regulatory model requires that 'everyone will pay the rate for what they use.' It does not work well in some instances. We have data that proves that low-income customers, in certain situations, dig themselves into a hole. In the winter they use more of the product, and they are paying the same for a kWh as someone who has access to greater resources."

The language used to describe communities and their populations had a lot of commonalities.



Question 2: What terms do you and your organization use to refer to the individuals and the communities who need consideration for equitable treatment? (E.g., "at-risk," "disadvantaged," etc.)

Themes – Terminology

Underserved/Disadvantaged/Vulnerable/
Marginalized/At-risk

Income/LMI

Communities (Frontline/Environmental
justice/Color)

Findings - Terminology

Words like 'disadvantaged' or 'vulnerable' are very common

Less common, but still prevalent are terms like 'frontline' or 'environmental justice communities'

Many of the responses could have been organized into any of the themes

The terminology organizations use could be defined further. Who is underserved? Who sits outside of these definitions and what's their community role?

With some exceptions, most of the terms used are deficit-based and not asset-based

- See [Case Study: Asset vs Deficit Community Engagement](#) (ECEE, 2021)

Themes - Segmentation

Income/Poverty Level

Demographics

Programs (Low-income communities; solar)

Geography (local)

Findings - Segmentation

Segmentation is largely the same here, focusing on common demographics such as income, geography, or ethnicity

Less common segments include by spoken language or stakeholder groups (i.e., grassroots community organizations, funders, practitioners, etc.)

Some groups took their cue from regional or state level government organizations

Many groups that responded don't perform any kind of segmentation, or they were in the process of designing that practice

Segmentation is about data, an important tool to better understand people and their situations

Segmentation can be challenging because it also touches on identity. An emotional element to be mindful about

Themes – Biggest Challenges

Cost/Finances/Resources

- “It’s always about money - the incentives for the suppliers and the cost for the consumers”

Collaboration/Communication

- “Collaboration amongst all industries, energy providers and a wide range of individuals. Everyone has opinions, wants and needs but everyone also needs to be open to the discussion and ideas of others, even if different from your own. Practical and affordable solutions are important vs a solution for the sake of solution's sake.”

Systemic Barriers

- “The complexity of the energy system and the complexity of societal systems that have set up in-equitable situations.”

Data/Metrics/Information

- “Measuring and tracking benefits and burdens to identify appropriate programs and energy resources to address past burdens and improve benefits to impacted communities.”

Biggest Challenges - Select Verbatims

“Addressing the past negative impacts of systemic racism to achieve energy and environmental justice. Addressing the digital divide which prevents communities of color from participating the technology opportunities in a clean energy economy.”

“The transition to a clean energy economy is fundamentally an economic transition. Such transitions have rarely, if ever, been fair to disenfranchised, disinvested and under-resourced communities. The clean energy transition will be no different and no more fair unless there is a core intention to address the underlying and systematic social and economic realities that create the inequities in today's society.”

“Collaboration, both internally and externally, is going to be critical, we don't know what we don't know. Infrastructure is also a limitation, especially with tribal communities. There may not be enough to deliver energy to prospective customers. Culture shift, both internally and externally, will be necessary to be successful. There is a divide between what we are required to do, the desire to do something, and the question of whether it's a utility's responsibility.”

“[C]apturing and quantifying current disparities is a big challenge- generally, obtaining data to identify people with a high energy burden is a challenge (particularly income). Tracking energy burden over time for these populations will also be a challenge.”

Findings - Biggest Challenges

This question had the largest variety of answers, although there were some common themes, a lot of answers were difficult to categorize

Less common challenges were “split incentives” between landlords and tenants as well as low and outdated housing stock

The issue of data and metrics was a common theme of the survey, frequently showing up in research suggestions

Systemic barriers, such as a political will, was its own theme, but could argue that the other themes ultimately fall under this theme

Arguments could be made about any of these being the single greatest challenge, however each one is undoubtedly a challenge to an equitable transition

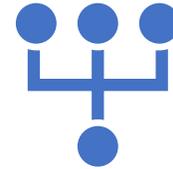
Lessons Learned



There's no common definition of equity. Crafting one from the themes gathered in the survey can greatly align the efforts of this collaborative



Terminology used is very common for both segmentation and descriptions. A couple key questions to ask around this: how can terminology impact equity efforts? Is the language that's used the best way to describe people and communities?



There's no challenge that's singularly the biggest and the ones listed, and others not, must be considered when undertaking any equitable effort.



Although present in the survey results, the role of race and ethnicity has been a more common theme in ECEE workgroup conversations as it relates to defining 'equity'

Defining Equity & Reassessing the Challenge Statement

The ambiguity of equity is the first hurdle for organizations and this Collaborative to overcome. The definitions that members provided were varied and often nuanced. The lack of a common definition will limit our ability to agree to metrics (how to measure changes in equity) and our ability to agree to a research agenda. Research is designed to gather information to answer a question, but if the words are not well defined, we cannot frame the question. Without a common definition, it becomes difficult to prioritize which barriers to equity to focus on. Deciding on a definition of equity will provide a foundation for the work of this Collaborative and may influence how the members and their organizations use it in the future.

Contact

Patrick Woodworth, Research Associate
pwoodworth@defgllc.com

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