



## **Clean Power, Healthy Communities 2017**

### **Background Information for the *Community Choice* breakout session**

Energy is one of the necessities of life, like clean air, water, food, shelter and healthcare. For more than 100 years control and ownership of energy resources has been in the hands of large corporations -- Shell, Chevron, PG&E -- you get the picture.

The ability to produce electricity using wind and sun, with wind turbines and solar panels has opened up the possibility that all of us, as communities, could generate our own electricity; we could take control and ownership of that essential resource away from corporations and put it in our hands. This is what we mean when we talk about energy democracy.

Communities that own and/or control their own energy resources can get many benefits. There are direct benefits such as switching to cleaner, renewable energy and getting rid of polluting power plants, addressing the urgent crisis of climate change, and lowering energy bills by eliminating the need for huge profits.

But there are other benefits such as creating jobs and increasing business activity that result when we decide to develop those clean energy resources right in our communities, through rooftop solar, community-scale solar projects and wind farms. There are programs such as community shared solar that offer opportunities for everyone to be part owners in these clean energy projects, and profit from the electricity they produce.

Many cities and counties in California, including Alameda County, are setting up public not-for-profit Community Choice energy programs as alternatives to private, for-profit utilities like PG&E. Because these public agencies are governed by elected officials, community members can push for programs and policies that increase local control and ownership of energy resources and address pressing issues such as skyrocketing rents, unemployment, and systemic poverty in low income communities and communities of color--those that have been most harmed by the fossil fuel economy.

Alameda County is launching its own Community Choice energy program, East Bay Community Energy, next year. It's up to us to make sure it serves our community.

The purpose of this breakout session is to brainstorm ways in which Community Choice energy programs, as not-for-profit alternatives to investor-owned utilities like PG&E, can deliver equitable economic development and community benefits, particularly for low-income communities and communities of color, including how increased community ownership and control of clean energy resources can help ensure these community benefits.

#### **Community Choice energy programs**

- What does it mean to have a publicly entity replacing PG&E? There are close to ten Community Choice energy programs in California now and none of them have yet delivered the full range of community benefits that are possible. How do we ensure that a Community Choice energy program is actually accountable to the communities it serves?

- How can communities ensure that there is equity in policy decisions that determine the operation of the program to maximize community benefits, especially for low income communities and communities of color?
- Why is it important for a Community Choice energy program, a public, not-for-profit alternative to the investor-owned utilities, to increase local ownership and control of clean energy resources, including renewable generation and energy efficiency, and what does it take to make that happen?
- The investor-owned utilities in California, including PG&E, and the California Public Utility Commission see the growth of Community Choice energy programs as an existential threat and are continuously proposing legislation and regulations that would make it impossible for Community Choice programs to compete. What are strategies for Community Choice energy programs effectively shut down the opposition?
- What are the main factors in Community Choice energy programs that make them so popular that Community Choice agencies may soon surpass the private utilities in the number of customers served? How can we utilize these elements to fight legislation and regulatory decisions that are harmful to Community Choice?