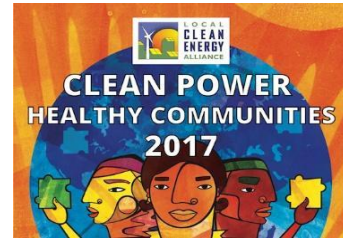


Report on Conference Breakout Sessions November 17, 2017



In support of the theme *Bringing Energy to the Movement for Justice*, the Local Clean Energy Alliance featured five breakout sessions at its Clean power, Healthy Communities Conference, November 17, 2017, to engage participants on the relation of local energy to social justice.

The morning plenary sessions set the stage with a focus on democratizing energy at both the national and local level.

The five afternoon breakout sessions were designed to further the discussion of how local control and ownership of clean energy resources can make communities more equitable, economically stronger, more resilient, and build stronger unions and workforce development. What follows is a report covering each of the five breakout sessions based on notes transcribed from each. The transcribed notes from each session can be viewed [here](#).

The Local Clean Energy Alliance thanks all the community activists working on issues such as affordable housing, unions, workforce development, local economic development, Community Choice energy programs, community shared solar, energy cooperative and neighborhood microgrids, who lent their experience and expertise to the discussions that took place. We particularly thank our facilitators, who volunteered their time to lead these fruitful discussions.

Contents

Housing, displacement, and other community crises	1
Building union strength and workforce development	3
Local economic development.....	5
Community Choice energy programs	7
Cooperatives, shared solar, and neighborhood microgrids	10

Housing, displacement, and other community crises

Facilitators: June Brashares, Colin Miller

The session focused on the causes and general solutions needed to address the current housing and displacement crisis. In particular, it discussed the impact that energy projects have had in gentrifying communities and how to use renewable energy development to instead strengthen local communities.

Session participants discussed the following causes of the current housing and displacement crises:

- That the real estate market is a driver of inequality in communities in the Bay Area.
- A solution to the crises is made nearly impossible in California due to the [Costa-Hawkins bill 1995](#), which prevents rent control on any buildings constructed after 1994.
- Absentee investments in local housing make the crisis worse.

The discussion covered ways to solve the housing crises, including:

- In January 2018, an attempt to repeal Costa-Hawkins will be launched.
- State policies such as a tax on second homes, or a tax on homes worth over \$2 million could raise money to address the housing crisis.
- Establishing land trusts and housing/ real estate cooperatives such as [the East Bay Permanent Real Estate Cooperative](#) and the [Sogorea Te Land Trust](#) to promote non-exploitative, extractive housing solutions.



- We must build a strong and broad base of support, so housing is seen as a right not a commodity.
- A universal basic income would go a long way towards easing the housing crisis.

Participants grappled with ways to increase community control and ownership of clean energy resources that would ease the housing and displacement crises, including:

- The need to reframe clean energy, “greening,” initiatives so they are not viewed as agents of gentrification, but ways for communities to be empowered. Reframing energy in housing as a right not a commodity.
- The importance of not colonizing clean energy projects, taking up space in poor neighborhoods to profit Wall Street investors. We need to push for investments in community resilience.
- There should be building standards for clean energy supply and energy efficiency for all housing in the Bay Area, especially for low cost housing.
- The creation of community energy cooperatives and community shared solar projects to extend ownership of clean energy to low income communities and communities of color, such as [Soulardarity](#) in Highland Park, Michigan.
- Using direct action to liberate solar equipment and other clean energy gear necessary to set up our own clean power resources.

In particular, the session pointed to ways that Alameda County’s soon-to-launch Community Choice program, East Bay Community Energy (EBCE), could create programs and policies that would ease the housing and displacement crises, including:

- EBCE becoming a convener of neighbor to neighbor hubs of organizing around energy issues?
- EBCE working with [TURN-The Utility Reform Network](#) to ensure protections for low income residents.
- EBCE capping electricity bills at 10% of income and better shut-off subsidies (current subsidies are available too close to the shut-off date).

Building union strength and workforce development

Facilitator: Haleh Zandi

The session covered a range of issues regarding local employment, especially general barriers to employment and job training for members of the community, and the potential for renewable energy jobs, in particular, to address these issues.

Participants volunteered some current strengths and weaknesses of unions, including:

- The value of the diversity of union views
- Union jobs are sustainable/ have job security and provide entry/access into emerging markets
- There's solidarity among union members
- Union benefits and representation extend to workers who don't have job protections
- There are many construction jobs (but not many maintenance long-term jobs)
- Unions need to be more proactive around organizing and recruiting
- Unions are currently overstretched due to current struggles (eg. right to work laws)



The discussion raised several issues related to engaging and empowering people with barriers to employment, including:

- Formerly incarcerated people who are subject to background checks and frequently lose the right to vote.
- Undocumented people and immigrants who are not protected by law. We need to bring those voices and perspectives to the table early in workforce programs.
- Youth need mentoring programs. Due to the cultural push to get higher education, they often have taken on debt. Unions can do a better job of direct marketing to millennials.
- Low income communities of color should get preferential hire by zip code to increase the representation of people of color in the workforce. The [Bay Area Black Workers Center](#) is a good resource.
- Women workers require working conditions that can accommodate health needs such as pregnancy and early childhood care.
- Indigenous sovereignty raises the issue that the National Labor Relations Act continues to oppress native peoples in the workforce. Projects such as the tar sands, DAPL and Keystone XL are all harming indigenous communities. [Sogorea'te Land Trust](#) facilitates the return of Bay Area lands to indigenous people. Winona La Duke and [White Earth Nation](#) have been demonstrating large scale clean energy projects. The Cowboy and Indian Alliance in the Dakotas takes action in defense of native peoples and the environment.

The discussion also focused on some pathways to a just transition, including:

- Pre-apprenticeship programs to help with the retention and professional development of participants. [Cypress Mandela](#) and [Rising Sun Energy Center](#) are examples of pre-apprenticeship programs that offer certificates and degrees. Attendees are trained and educated, but there are few job opportunities.
- [MC3 curriculum](#) is recommended for pre-apprenticeship programs as the most effective for entry into apprenticeship programs.
- Entry-level jobs are needed to get people into the clean energy industry.
- [Utility Pre-Craft Trainee \(UPCT\)](#) program by LA Department of Water and Power & IBEW is a small scale model program that is costly but effective.
- [Movement Generation](#) looks to international examples for organizing for good jobs. [System Change not Climate Change](#) looks at root causes.

The focus on local jobs included the following points:

- There is increased attention on the importance of local jobs given gentrification, displacement and segregation
- Cooperatives and associations can be a way to create more local jobs, but can this model be translated to a large scale? Watch, ["A New Economy"](#) film on cooperatives.
- We need a shorter work week with higher wages.
- We need to elect representatives who aren't funded by interests such as the Koch brothers, fossil fuels or chemical and munitions industries. We need to make candidates pledge not to take money from these interests. Voters should follow the voting suggestions of the nurses, [California Nurses Association](#) and [National Nurses United](#), and [Climate Hawks vote](#).
- The current housing crisis and climate crisis create opportunities for innovation in job creation.

A discussion of jobs in the current solar and energy efficiency Industries included:

- Aggregated projects can include better labor standards than the single-family home residential market. However, it takes a lot of community organizing to aggregate projects.
- The solar industry is volatile, therefore jobs in that industry are not stable. Residential solar does not operate on an industrial scale, which makes it hard to offer good-paying, stable jobs. The solar industry should at least provide prevailing wages, currently at \pm \$15/hr.
- The Labor movement struggles against laws that are set up for corporate monopolization. Tesla employees organizing to unionize with United Auto Workers: many were unfairly fired, clearly because of organizing. They need money and lawyers, the plant used to be Fremont Toyota which was union.

Finally, the discussion turned to the issue of integrating fossil fuel workers, into a new clean energy economy.

- There is pride, identity and high salaries that are tied to fossil fuel industries, \$150,000/year salaries for steelworkers. However, there is also a growing movement of workers who recognize that fossil fuels have a toxic, carcinogenic effect. We need to

build on that movement. An example of the struggle can be found in the book, *Refinery Town*, by Steve Early. It describes the struggle between the [Richmond Progressive Alliance](#) and Chevron.

- In order to mitigate and adapt to climate change, many industries will need to shift and work be aligned with alternative industries, such as auto and transportation, retrofitting old buildings, agricultural and water systems. Existing infrastructure in fossil fuel industries can be used to create jobs without destructive impact.
- Ways to aid this shift include funneling fossil fuel tax breaks into just transition projects and using Project Labor Agreements. The movement for a just transition is hampered by Corporate Personhood, privatization and militarization.

Local economic development

Facilitators: Session #1: Aaron Lehmer-Chang; Session #2 Corrine Van Hook, Victoria Benson

In this session, discussion centered on how new clean energy projects can be a source of community wealth. There was a focus on how Alameda County's emerging Community Choice program, [East Bay Community Energy](#), can create these projects. Key points were made under the following issues.

East Bay Community Energy (EBCE) as a Public Electric Service agency

- EBCE will roll out in 2018, serving 1.5 million people in Alameda County for electricity. There is a [Local Development Business Plan](#) in progress, which will include many provisions to encourage developing local clean energy projects. It will describe the economic impact, job development and wealth that can be generated through local clean energy projects.
- The current implementation plan for the agency is very conservative and needs to be more aggressive to get revenue flowing into the program that can be used to incentivize local development.
- The agency needs to have a mission of generating projects that support those who come forward with ideas, especially people of color. It is important that they include minority owned certification as part of the contracting process.
- There is a Community Advisory Committee, whose chair sits as an ex-officio (non-voting) member of the Board of Directors. This is an important conduit for community input into the design of the agency.



Jobs

- Local hiring keeps money in the community. Clean energy jobs created must be with local companies and companies owned by people of color.
- There needs to be support for community college programs that train for energy audit jobs.

Housing

- Cooperative, non-profit efforts to buy properties for others to live in needs legal support. That effort should always include energy efficiency requirements.

Banking

- [Beneficial State Bank](#) has a pilot program that brings money to families for electric cars, solar, and other clean energy products. But these kinds of banking efforts must be expanded.
- [Friends of Public Bank of Oakland](#) has spearheaded the effort to create a local public bank. They secured enough money to fund a feasibility study for the City of Oakland to set up a public bank. This bank would be a wholesale bank. It would not have accounts for individuals, but other public and large private concerns, like the city itself.
- The Bay Area needs a Regional Prosperity Plan. This can be tricky because large corporate interests like PG&E and Chevron pay union wage and overtime.

Key Points to Enhance Local Economic Development

Key Points to guide local economic development policy decisions.

- There should be holistic training and education programs to ensure that people in our communities are prepared for non-labor jobs in administration, finance, outreach/ call center, research and development and other technical clean energy jobs and career pathway jobs.
- There should be support for local entrepreneurs to participate as contractors and providers of clean energy resources within EBCE. For instance, to stimulate local business activity there needs to be incentives in the contracting process, workshops, and outreach to and for local businesses.
- There needs to be a policy where companies are financially incentivized to hire locally, or one that requires non-local hires incur a financial penalty (for the contractor) that gets invested in a local training pot.
- EBCE should offer a Feed in Tariff (FiT) to incentivize the development of local clean energy projects.
- Shared renewable energy projects, such as community shared solar, should serve local load first to ensure that the benefit stays in the community and does not go to Wall Street investors.

Community Choice energy programs

Facilitator: Woody Hastings

This session focused on community benefits made possible through Community Choice energy programs, as well as current threats to Community Choice in California.

The breakout sessions began with some background information about Community Choice programs. Key points covered included:

- Community choice aggregation, the process of forming Community Choice energy, originated in Massachusetts in 1997.
- Paul Fenn, author of the Community Choice bills in Massachusetts and California began efforts to bring Community Choice to California in the aftermath of energy crisis, which included the ENRON scandal.
- Community choice aggregation bill was enacted in 2002 by the California legislature. It allows cities and counties by a vote of board of supervisors, alder people or council people to form a public, not-for-profit agency to take control of the electricity decisions and procurement.
- A more technical definition is that the bill gives cities & counties statutory authority to aggregate loads of utility customers, purchase power and/ or develop power sources, and sell it to the aggregated customers. The aggregation is an opt out process. All customers within a jurisdiction become customers of the Community Choice program, unless they choose to opt out and return to the competing private utility.
- Setting up a Community Choice program redirects the revenue stream into local control.
- The investor-owned utilities have opposed Community Choice from the beginning, launching a statewide proposition that would put a stop to such programs just as Marin Clean Energy (now MCE) was forming.
- Community Choice programs have been found to be the single most powerful tool for governments to rapidly reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), though the Community Choice law AB117 doesn't state anything about the source that the power should derive from, other than all Community Choice programs must comply with the California Renewable Portfolio Standard.
- Community Choice programs find there is a balancing act of GHG benefits of renewables, competitive rates, local benefits and job creation. It's up to the Community Choice agency/community as to how to balance what the priorities are.



Participants raised many questions about potential community benefits of Community Choice programs, including:

- What kinds of programs are Community Choice agencies offering? What can they do to promote local renewable projects under statute?
- How can Community Choice programs incentivize solar programs?
- Can we get more specific about community benefits that Community Choice programs should be creating, and how can we make those benefits real?
- Low income people are still struggling with their utility bills, even if power is purchased from a Community Choice agency. What can a program do that is above and beyond the kinds of CARE programs already out there?
- Can we make a Venn diagram of strategies that maximize the stability of Community Choice; and programs that aid justice, equity, local benefit goals?
- How can we best deal with the tension between managing risk and revenues to keep the agency sound financially, and the community benefit goals that the program could offer?
- Do we have more ability to influence benefits and less ability to influence the exit fee?
- Local resources may be more expensive at first but the costs of financing remain stable, while competing utility rates go up over time. In the long run Community Choice could out-perform utilities. What does that time frame look like?

Some ideas were put forward about how Community Choice agencies can maximize community benefits in their programs, including:

- They can set rates and rate structures that incentivize purchases of certain technologies and efficiency measures. They can take control of revenues to reinvest in local efficiency programs.
- Because Community Choice agencies are allowed to select who they buy power from, they could require contracts that allow ownership structures for community to increase over time.
- When a Community Choice agency goes out to market to procure energy, they put out a request for offers (RFO). The agency can ask suppliers to include community benefits in the offers.
- The Community Choice agency could promote commercial size installations in low-income neighborhoods with a Feed in Tariff (FiT), such as MCE's FiT, which purchases power from solar projects up to 1 MW.

Participants also discussed threats to Community Choice, including:

- The Power Charge Indifference Adjustment (PCIA), which is an exit fee set by the CPUC, levied by the IOUs on Community Choice customers, allegedly to compensate them for power they contracted for before those customers left. IOUs claim they were mandated to buy renewable energy at high prices, and now can only sell them for a loss.
- The PCIA is determined by the CPUC annually on January 1, but it has increased by varying percentages, which creates a lot of uncertainty in Community Choice programs. Before Peninsula Clean Energy (PCE) launched, the PCIA increased by 25%, so PCE had to increase their rates by 25%.
- This uncertainty leads CCAs to set aside “rainy day” funds, which reduce the money available for innovative community benefit programs.

- There is a CPUC proceeding to attempt to make the process of how the IOUs adjust the exit fee year to year more transparent. They are also considering the question of whether the exit fee will ever go away. There may be a decision by the middle of next year. In order to be a party in the decision you must have intervener status, which the [CalCCA](#) (a statewide business association of existing and prospective Community Choice energy programs) has. There is always time for public comment at public meetings (there were different levels of agreement in the room about usefulness of the public comment option).
- Another threat to Community Choice that was discussed was the [Equitable Energy Choice for Californians](#) which appears to be organized by California's IOU to attack Community Choice.

Several other issues came up in discussion, including:

- Setting the stage for community choice aggregation in other states. Right now there are Community Choice laws in only 7 or 8 states. It is important to address the replicability of existing CCA models in other regions and countries. As Community Choice spreads it will be important to learn from the experience with previous laws and incorporate improvements. LEAN Energy US is working on Community Choice in Oregon, Virginia and some other states. It only makes sense in states with regulated utilities. It would be helpful to revitalize Rural Electrical Co-ops in places where they exist.
- Community Choice support of unions and labor forces. To build mutual support groups who are encouraging the adoption of Community Choice in new places must get involved with local unions. It is important to make sure that Community Choice agencies craft language in policies and programs that is supportive of labor and involve labor in that process.
- Outreach Challenges. We need to educate people about Community Choice to address their concerns, such as bill rates. It's important to explain terminology and use terms that are easily understandable, avoiding undefined acronyms. It is good to make use of Community Advisory Councils that consist of people with wide influence in their communities.

5 Important takeaways

- Red alert: there are legislative and regulatory threats to Community Choice coming up in 2018, and the battle will need all hands on deck. Groups should coordinate on action alerts.
- There needs to be a balance between organizational stability and community innovation; both are important to long term success of Community Choice programs.
- CCA advocates and CCA operators need to be on the same page.
- There is an opportunity to use competition in bidding process to get the community benefits that are desired.
- CCA programs need to create long-term equity benefits for community and shift power over time to the community.

Cooperatives, shared solar, and neighborhood microgrids

Facilitator: Yasir Cross.

This session discussed characteristics of community-based energy, including microgrids, and how to develop it in low-income communities.

The breakout session began with the following question: what comes to mind from the term, “Community based energy?” There was a wide variety of thoughts including:

- Ability to speak up, be heard and have power
- A Cooperative ownership program at the neighborhood level
- The community itself has ability to steer/ direct the cooperative
- Crowd funding via the community
- A consideration of air quality
- An alternative to industrial development
- Folks who have bought in can receive benefits
- Local ownership and microgrids are essential to resilience, eg. Puerto Rico vs Haiti
- Importance of local awareness campaigns - Solar is contagious
- Low income families may be shut out of information about energy options



The group considered the question of how do we get solar into low income communities, and proposed the following thoughts about solutions:

- Consider the goals and power of shared solar: create hope for most impacted communities, build community power and increase community-owned energy assets.
- Low income community organizations can serve as models for accessibility. Churches and community centers can become hubs to reach low income communities.
- It will require organizing communities who may not have access to rooftops or home ownership.
- Crowd funding within the community could be a source of financing for these projects.
- Utilize labor co-operatives.
- Utilize schools and educators to get projects installed and use savings/profits to power education.

The discussion also focused on the role of microgrids in community-based energy:

- Microgrids include components for capturing, storing and distributing the power.
- Microgrids offer resilience in the case of outages, which will be exacerbated by extreme weather events due to climate change.
- The community benefits of microgrids include getting community members to contribute to the design, ownership and decision-making about the microgrid. It can also offer access to broader benefits including, local jobs, housing, etc. Community control invites different benefits.
- Microgrids require intensive development, city bonds for residents, and should include community ownership of installations.
- Microgrids require accessibility to communities and technical support, sometimes from the public.
- A major barrier to setting up community microgrids is financing!! The costs are difficult to manage. Some ideas to raise money are to use crowdfunding before the install and leveraging of available public money. Another possible financing mechanism are bonds structured via a solar community-based credit union.
- [EPIC](#), the Electric Program Investment Charge Program was created by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) in December 2011- “to support investments in clean energy technologies that provide benefits to the electricity ratepayers.”
- Microgrids offer resilience in the case of outages, which will be exacerbated by extreme weather events due to climate change.
- Microgrid’s community benefits include getting community members to contribute to the design, ownership and decision-making about the microgrid. It can also offer access to broader benefits including, local jobs, housing, etc. Community control invites different benefits.
- Cooperatives can provide upfront install costs and then be integrated into the ownership and investment model so it operates as a community buy-in aggregate.

Finally, participants considered answers to the following question: when developing community renewable energy projects, how do we keep capital in communities? The discussion further generated the question of how do we do this on scale and divert finances from the military and extractive industry. Answers included

- Work with groups that are focused on divesting from fossil fuels to inform people about the opportunity to reinvest in local solar cooperatives – One contact is Martha Turner at [Fossil Free](#) California.
- Public Banks, such as the Public Bank of North Dakota, can be dedicated to financing community-controlled energy projects.
- There needs to be a participatory budgeting process for cities or other public entities that can invest in these projects.
- Require that a certain percent of all investing goes to community-based power building.
- There is an example of a limited liability corporation that was set up in [University Park, Maryland](#), that worked in partnership with a church to set up a community solar project. The church hosted the solar project and community member could buy into the LLC and receive dividend for their investment into the project. It’s a good model. There is another model in Greenville, Texas.

- Tax equity is a big financing tool and is necessary now to make community solar affordable. This may not be accessible locally, but it is possible to create a community-based solar developer national fund, which could have more direct access to tax equity investors.
- Another financing possibility is to utilize community-sourced capital to finance solar facilities through such mechanisms as Direct Public Offerings.

