



Clean Power, Healthy Communities 2017

Background Information for the *Cooperatives, shared solar and neighborhood microgrids* 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 alternative economic models and technological innovations can help communities gain control and ownership of clean energy resources. The following questions are provided to help guide the discussion, but we encourage you to come up with your own.

Cooperatives, shared solar, and neighborhood microgrids.

- California has by far the most solar in the country, yet most of the benefits go to wealthy homeowners that can put panels on their roofs or large, private corporations that own utility-scale solar systems. How can low-income communities benefit from renewable energy, and how can alternative economic structures, such as cooperatives, make that possible?
- What are some examples we can look to for community ownership of renewable energy resources? What ownership models exist?

- How would an energy coop work, how would it be different from a shared solar project?
- How can technological innovations such as microgrids be used to increase local control and ownership of clean energy resources?
- How can the community ensure that the benefits of shared solar projects, or technological innovations like microgrids go to renters or community members rather than large investors or developers?
- For each of the three tools--coops, shared solar and neighborhood microgrids--what are the major steps in organizing and implementation? What are the main barriers for each and what are strategies to overcome those barriers?
- How can we prioritize the participation and agency of low-income communities and communities of color--those most impacted by the existing fossil-fuel based economy--in each of these tools?