

PRIMER

CORPORATE AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PRIMER

PATHWAYS TO CREATE MUTUAL BENEFITS THROUGH RENEWABLE ENERGY PROCUREMENT



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ABOUT THE CLEAN ENERGY BUYERS INSTITUTE

The Clean Energy Buyers Institute (CEBI) solves the toughest market and policy barriers to achieve a carbon-free energy system. CEBI's aspiration is to achieve a 90% carbon-free U.S. electricity system by 2030 and a global community of customers driving clean energy.

To learn more about the Clean Energy Buyers Institute, visit

www.cebi.org.

OVERVIEW

The **Corporate and Community Engagement Primer** outlines suggestions, processes, and additional resources to support key stakeholders at the start of the renewable energy procurement journey. The companion tool for the Primer, the **Corporate and Community Engagement Decision Framework**, provides guidance on the assessment process, building a business case, and establishing internal and external teams to pursue community engagement as a part of your renewable energy strategy.

The suggestions within each resource are derived from conversations with corporations, third-party organizations, and community organizations that took place from 2020-2021. It is important to note that:



- The resource authors are **not** experts in this subject matter. The guidance provided in the Primer and the Decision Framework is based on feedback and input from key stakeholders.
- The guidance is not comprehensive and should not be construed as evaluation mechanisms.
- It is imperative to work in collaboration with others who have the same values and vision to create truly mutual advantages for all stakeholders.

THE PURPOSE The information provided in the **Corporate and Community Engagement Primer** is intended to be directional, inspirational, and educational. The resource focuses on guidance for the stage before actual procurement of renewable energy during which a company secures leadership buy-in, establishes internal and external project teams, and determines key strategic and project-based goals. Companies should strive to have long-term relationships with communities that go beyond the renewable energy procurement process to ensure key input and lessons are integrated within broader energy strategies.



WHO SHOULD READ THIS: This guidance was created for renewable energy customers across the commercial and industrial sectors that are interested in engaging with local communities to intentionally create mutual advantages through the procurement of large-scale renewable energy.



The **Clean Energy Buyers Institute (CEBI)** and **Groundswell** collaboratively developed the **Corporate and Community Engagement Primer** and the **Corporate and Community Engagement Decision Framework** through funding provided by the **JPB Foundation**.

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

America's largest businesses have championed renewable energy for over a decade, leading the evolution of the energy market, and have an opportunity to intentionally support local communities by collaborating to identify and incorporate community-defined benefits as a component of renewable energy strategies. The **Corporate and Community Engagement Primer** provides corporate energy customers with guidance to take the first steps for corporate and community communication to facilitate mutual understanding and redefine the pre-procurement stage of a renewable energy project.

This resource focuses on guidance for the stage before actual procurement of renewable energy during which a company secures leadership buy-in, establishes internal and external project teams, and determines key strategic and

project-based goals. No two renewable energy projects are ever the same, and energy projects that integrate community engagement are even more complex given the distinct nature of community needs and stakeholders. This resource identifies key commonalities and summarizes lessons learned from community leaders that can be applied by energy customers, including essential questions to consider:

How can a company start the community engagement journey?

- *What are the best, most equitable approaches to working with communities?*
- *What pathways exist to create mutual advantages for companies and communities?*



II. WHAT SHOULD A COMPANY KNOW BEFORE PURSUING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

Pursuing community engagement as an integral component of a renewable energy project is not unlike pursuing a partnership with another company in that it requires a comprehensive evaluation of driving factors for engagement. The unique component of community engagement is the community's experience that a company must take into consideration, including past experiences with partnerships, current challenges, and needs, as well as lessons that have been learned over several years regarding the locale. Discussing these components can help identify key areas where a company and community

can collaborate to create mutual advantages. Additional considerations for companies include:

- Establish internal buy-in across leadership to ensure that key goals and priorities are reflected in a project-specific or broad renewable energy strategy.
- Identify key locales where renewable energy projects may be located to identify avenues for community engagement.
- Nurture existing relationships to foster trust with key stakeholders that are essential to project success and viability.
- Research communities of interest to understand existing challenges, partnerships, and needs in conjunction with actual discussions with community leaders.

The [Summary of the Working Wisdom Listening Tour](#) provides insights on how corporations can equitably interact with communities. This summary document was informed by a conversation series focused on starting a dialogue between corporations and communities. The series was hosted in Spring 2021 by Groundswell, **Clean Energy Buyers Institute (CEBI)**, The Solutions Project, and The Hummingbird Firm. In this series, leaders from community-based organizations shared their challenges with an audience of more than 90 organizations that included large energy buyers and decision-makers. Through removing barriers around open communication that leads to mutual understanding, this series laid the groundwork for more effective collaboration.

III. WHY IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IMPORTANT TO RENEWABLE ENERGY PROCUREMENT?

Renewable energy strategies of leading companies have evolved from procurement based on economic benefits of clean energy, to more intentionally address environmental and societal challenges. Companies understand that renewable energy procurement is a commitment to a better future and tackling climate change requires a multi-faceted approach. A renewable energy project that doesn't include community engagement as a key component won't achieve optimum performance or maximize benefits.

01

Reason 1: The next logical step

Addressing community priorities is another way to expand corporate climate action goals beyond greenhouse gas (GHG) emission targets, 24/7 load balancing, and 100% renewable goals. In an effort to take renewable energy projects to the next level, corporate energy customers have shifted focus to maximize benefits through community engagement.

02

Reason 2: New norm

As companies hit 100% renewable goals or meet GHG emissions targets, a new question has emerged: What is the new norm for renewable energy? The market – corporate energy customers, public agencies, governments, and other major institutional buyers of renewable energy – has sent a clear signal that addressing community equity, access, and justice in climate issues is a priority.

03

Reason 3: Integration of ESG

Sustainability leaders understand that social issues, like sustainability and equity, do not exist in siloes. Instead, effectively addressing climate change requires effort across the board. A general reframing is occurring where energy procurement goals must work together across environmental, social, and governance goals.

IV. INTERNAL PROCESS GUIDANCE

Check out the [Corporate and Community Engagement Decision Framework](#) to take your renewable energy goals to the next level. This framework will support the formation of beneficial, meaningful relationships with community leaders and ensure optimum project impact through an internal assessment. The following steps can help set the stage.

A

IDENTIFY GOALS

Many companies have some form of a community engagement goal or statement that can guide partnerships with communities by identifying partners that best align with your organization's values.

If goals around community engagement are unavailable or do not exist, discuss the topic with other internal teams like those that handle charitable contributions, stakeholder relationships, policy engagement, or Human Resources. What existing internal plans and goals can be applied?

B

ANALYZE EXISTING GOALS

Take a critical eye to organizational goals to identify where they may or may not apply to renewable energy. What are the gaps in the goals? Where can the local community be involved in project goal creation? **RESOURCE:** For suggestions on questions to ask and actions to take, see this [list of questions to assess internal goals](#).

C

BUILD AN INTERNAL CHAMPION NETWORK

Analyzing existing goals helps leverage work already done and connects individuals that have been involved in setting these goals. It also allows stakeholders to:

- Identify possible internal champions that might be interested in actively participating in community engagement.
- Build internal awareness and consensus around community engagement and community co-benefits and find new ways for applicable resources.
- Create the space and allow for community-focused goals across company teams, while encouraging the best practice of considering new viewpoints, challenges, or contributions.

D

WHAT TO DO IF YOU CANNOT ACTIVELY ENGAGE WITH THIS WORK AT THIS TIME

The process of engaging communities to create mutual advantages through renewable energy is an emerging, fast-changing movement with several complexities involved, and not all companies are in a position to take action. If your company is not yet ready to launch this major effort but would like to be kept informed of the latest developments, visit the [Clean Energy Buyers Institute \(CEBI\)](#), [Groundswell Labs](#), and the associated [resources](#) to keep up to date on some of the most recent innovations around this work.

V. BUILD THE TEAM

After gathering information about internal goals and identifying an internal champion network, consider what else is needed to engage communities in renewable energy procurement. Specifically, which individuals or skillsets are necessary to effectively

engage with community members and leaders? There are other external parties and actions to consider while preparing, including:

- What characteristics are important when evaluating external parties to support renewable energy project identification or investment options?
- What project characteristics are important when evaluating potential projects?
- What considerations are important before you enter the procurement process?

A

PARTNERSHIP AND ASSESSMENT OF A THIRD PARTY

Community engagement should not end on the commercial operations date of a project but span its full life as part of a community. Companies often leverage the support of external experts to advise on up-to-date market conditions and provide guidance on project components that may fluctuate over time. Consultants span a range of third-party experts in the community that provide a range of services including market intelligence, brokerage, financial advising, risk analysis, legal counsel, and more.

Searching for the right consultant to support community engagement can be difficult. **RESOURCE:** Use the [linked](#) list of questions and suggestions in the search process to identify the best third-party fit for your upcoming work.


B

PREPARATION BEFORE STARTING THE PROCUREMENT PROCESS

The procurement process represents one of the opportunities to legally bind company plans with the community, so it is important to integrate feedback and input from key community stakeholders.

RESOURCE: Access the [list of suggested ways to prepare](#) for the procurement process and to understand the dynamics of contracting. Ultimately, the procurement negotiation has to represent both community and corporate values, so it is important to understand how to establish conditions of accountability.

VI. CONCLUSION

A woman in a pink shirt and red cap is working on solar panels. A man in a white shirt and glasses is assisting her. The background shows a clear blue sky and green trees.

The guidance provided through the **Corporate and Community Engagement Primer** is meant to support companies at the start of the community engagement journey by outlining key strategic components that are vital to successfully creating long-term, mutually advantageous benefits for all stakeholders. All companies can help usher in a new era of procurement that goes beyond economic impacts by understanding the importance of integrating the feedback and input of local communities where renewable energy projects are located, establishing clear goals that guide company efforts, and implementing an intentional process and team.

Through the thoughtful funding of the JPB Foundation, the authoring organizations are able to open a space for considerable and careful dialogue intended to create a more equitable and safe space for discussion. The authors are also grateful that many local and regional organizations have the same values, mission, and objectives. There are a variety of resources available to companies looking to start a conversation with their community.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Ideas in this document were informed by many great resources from organizations leading complementary efforts. Listed below are a few of the resources that may provide helpful insights.

RESOURCE/LINK	
<u>City of Chicago Request for Proposal (RFP):</u>	<p>This request for proposal is an example of how to lay the foundation for your next project by including numerous ways to work towards co-benefit creation in the community that you decide to work in.</p>
<u>Working Wisdom Report</u>	<p>This report summarizes important takeaways and advice directly to corporations from various voices within different communities. The report on the Working Wisdom Listening Tour that occurred during February 2021 provided the details that allowed this document and an additional decision tree to be designed and completed.</p>
<u>More than a Megawatt paper</u>	<p>This document authored by Salesforce in partnership with various other organizations is a guiding document for scoring proposals on a wide variety of social and environmental categories, including biodiversity, land-use impacts, and air quality, in addition to community engagement. This document provides an idea of how buyers can choose the best proposal submitted to them to allow for mutual benefit creation</p>
<u>The Solutions Project</u>	<p>The Solutions Project is a nonprofit that is working to support climate changemakers at the grassroots level. This is done by connecting individuals with influential people and supporting them with grants as well as media coverage to provide a platform for individuals at the ground level.</p>
<u>Justice40 Accelerator</u>	<p>The Justice40 Accelerator allows for disadvantaged frontline communities to better apply for federal funds thanks to the Biden-Harris administration executive order. The partnership consists of 5 organizations working to provide communities with federal grant resources, partnership opportunities, technical expertise, and more.</p>



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