A. Build an Equitable, Inclusive, Resilient Clean Energy Economy

Solar installer on roof.
Shawn O'Connor/Alamy Stock Photo

A. Build an Equitable, Inclusive, Resilient Clean Energy Economy

Climate change threatens human health and access to clean air, safe drinking water, nutritious food and shelter. The Governor's Interagency Council on Health Disparities' Environmental Justice Taskforce (EJTF)[8] found that vulnerable populations and overburdened communities experience disproportionate, cumulative risk from environmental burdens, including climate change. Low-income communities are disproportionately more likely to experience the environmental and health disparities associated with climate change (Figure 2 and 3).[9,10]

The EJTF analysis found that "census tracts with the lowest environmental health disparities (EHD) rank are 83.2% white, 0.9% Black, and 6.2% Hispanic or Latino, while census tracts with the highest EHD rank are 45.6% white, 10.5% Black, and 22.7% Hispanic or Latino. Black Washingtonians were 10 times more likely to live in the highest ranked census tract than the lowest ranked census tract. If race was not associated with EHDs, one would expect the census tracts to have similar racial proportions." (See Figure 2)

The EJTF analysis further showed that the poverty rate in the highest EHD ranked census tract (rank 10) is more than double that of the lowest EHD ranked census tract (rank 1). (See Figure 3). This means that low-income communities are disproportionately more likely to experience the environmental and health disparities associated with climate change

FIGURE 2. RACE AND ETHNICITY

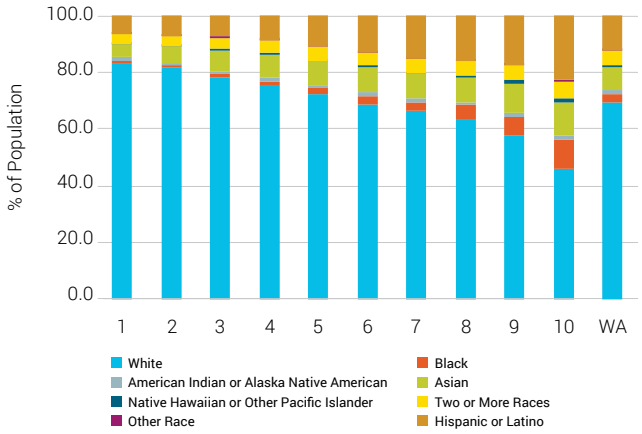
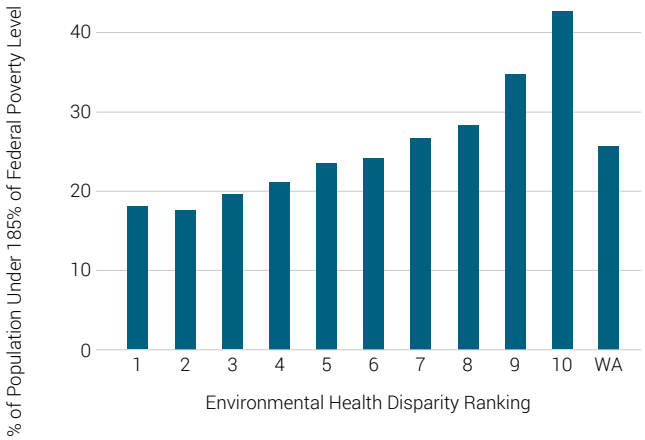


FIGURE 3. POVERTY BY ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH DISPARITY RANK



Source: Environmental Justice Task Force: Recommendations for Prioritizing EJ in Washington State Government. Figure 2, page 14; Figure 4, p. 16.

[8] "Environmental Justice Task Force," Governor's Interagency Council on Health Disparities, accessed November 1, 2020, https://healthequity.wa.gov/TheCouncilsWork/EnvironmentalJusticeTaskForceInformation.

[9] "Environmental Justice Task Force: Recommendations for Prioritizing EJ in Washington State Government," Fall 2020, https://healthequity.wa.gov/Portals/9/Doc/Publications/Reports/EJTF%20Report_FINAL.pdf.

[10] Joe Casola et al., "An Unfair Share Washington State: Exploring the Disproportionate Risks from Climate Change Facing Washington State Communities" (UW Climate Impacts Group, UW Department of Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences, Front and Centered and Urban@UW, 2018).

Environmental disparities include increased air pollution, water contamination, flooding and wildfires. Health disparities include increased rates of asthma, cancer, heart attacks, infectious disease, infant mortality and heat stress. Communities at the greatest risk of these hazards are also more likely to be under 185% of the federal poverty level.[11]

Communities and families experiencing environmental health disparities and other burdens created by the disproportionate impacts of pollution are less able to adapt to or recover from climate change impacts. Environmental equity will be achieved when no single group or community faces disadvantages in dealing with the effects of the climate crisis, pollution, environmental hazards or environmental disasters.

Addressing these disparities requires acknowledging the inequities that have led to them. This transition is underway. As the EJTF's *Recommendations for Prioritizing EJ in Washington State Government* report details, Washington has become an international leader in environmental justice over the last two decades. This focus is reflected in the priorities laid out in Governor Inslee's December 2020 Climate Policy Brief and in legislative actions.

The Clean Energy Transformation Act of 2019 (CETA) requires that the state's transition to a 100% renewable or non-emitting electric grid includes the equitable distribution of clean energy benefits and reduction of burdens to communities highly impacted by climate change. The law provides tax preferences for clean energy projects meeting protective labor and contracting standards and requires Commerce and the state's utilities to assess energy assistance available to low-income households across the state.[12]

Among other factors, under CETA utilities must consider energy and non-energy benefits for and costs to vulnerable populations and highly impacted communities in their resource and clean energy planning. They must mitigate energy burdens and consider the adequacy of energy assistance programs.

CETA is a foundation for Washington's equitable, inclusive and resilient clean energy economy. Implementation of the 2021 State Energy Strategy should build on this. Experience tells us and data confirm that the costs and benefits of our energy future will not be shared equitably without intentional action. Policy makers must embed equity, resiliency and inclusivity into policy design and implementation.

Equitable energy policy design addresses inequities, while creating environmental and economic opportunities for all. It can strengthen the economy by supporting good, family-sustaining jobs for both urban and rural workers of all levels of educational attainment. It can mitigate the hazards of rising sea levels and ocean acidification on Washington's coasts and heat stress and wildfires in the eastern parts of the state. It can also offer the opportunity to improve democratic participation across state and local government and create public confidence in government.

The state must empower and provide opportunity for active participation by all of Washington's communities and residents. Equitable policy design will allow communities across the state to take advantage of the clean energy transition's economic and technological advancements.

[11] Charles Lee, "Identifying and Prioritizing Environmentally Impacted and Vulnerable Communities," https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2019-08/documents/state_ej_webinar_1-identifying_and_prioritizing_communities_ppt_resources_04.16.19.pdf. p. 45.

[12] "Supporting Washington's Clean Energy Economy and Transitioning to a Clean, Affordable, and Reliable Energy Future," Pub. L. No. SB 5116 (2019), https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=5116&Initiative=false&Year=2019.

1. Recognize that No Single Definition of Equity May be Satisfactory

Many definitions of equity exist, and no single definition can perfectly capture the expectations and goals of all communities and populations. The EJTF developed a recommended statewide definition for environmental justice, building on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's definition by adding outcomes for Washington.[13] This definition provides a starting point to identify and address current injustices and to inform future decisions and actions:

The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies. This includes using an intersectional lens to address disproportionate environmental and health impacts by prioritizing highly impacted populations, equitably distributing resources and benefits and eliminating harm.

The equity discussion woven throughout this strategy leans on this definition, in particular its use of "highly impacted populations" to name the priority communities whose inequities need to be identified and addressed. Highly impacted populations have connections across race and ethnicity, income, housing status, immigration status and heath disparities.

This definition has its limitations. Highly impacted populations are not a monolith and it is important to hold space for community members and advocates to come forward and weigh in on process and policy development. Each community, family and individual will have different histories and needs. There is no one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to equitable policy design. For instance, the inequities that exist in urban areas may well differ from those of rural areas. Policy needs to recognize and include elements that address the full spectrum of impacted interests.

ACTION

- Policy makers, stakeholders and the public must recognize the different perspectives of highly impacted populations and the limitations of any single definition when writing, enacting, implementing and analyzing energy policy.

2. Break from Historical Patterns and Narratives

CETA and the recent law revising Washington's greenhouse gas reduction limits[14] acknowledge that it is in the public interest to embed equity in our state's energy policy. Yet historical conversations and solutions in energy policy tended to focus on energy price, assuming low costs for all are equitable and that local participation will occur without direct and specific outreach and inclusion. Much of the conversation on equity by policy makers ignores the role of history in shaping the lived experiences of highly impacted populations. This results in the perpetuation of exclusion and inequities.

- **Equity must consider the price of energy but also energy sufficiency and the health and economic impacts from energy production.** It is not an equitable result if everyone receives low electricity rates and gas prices, while highly impacted populations disproportionately bear the health and economic costs of our energy system or lack sufficient energy to live healthy, productive lives.
- **Equity is not in and of itself assured through fair and open public meetings.** Fair and open public comment sessions do not invite comments from those historically excluded. These voices must be intentionally sought out, respected, empowered and privileged.
- **The clean energy transition will not be equitable if it benefits only a few or if the costs are not fairly distributed across communities.** The institutions largely responsible for our current inequities share a common responsibility to assist highly impacted populations and ensure their participation in the clean energy transition.

ACTION

- Recognize that historical energy policy has been based on incomplete understanding of equity and offer more holistic, historically informed context for ensuring an equitable outcome.

[13] "Environmental Justice Task Force: Recommendations for Prioritizing EJ in Washington State Government."

[14] Chapter 70A 454.020 RCW.

Makah Bay at sunset. This beach is four miles southwest of Neah Bay on the Makah Reservation at the Northwest tip of Washington State. catsandotcom/iStock

3. Ensure Public Participation and Inclusion of Historically Marginalized Voices

Public and community participation is important to ensure energy policy is informed by local knowledge, meets local needs and is viewed as legitimate by the local community. Whenever possible, enhanced technical assistance should be provided to facilitate the involvement of smaller communities, organizations, utilities and companies. The system must have capacity to consult with and include communities and community members must have a seat at the table in designing programs and selecting projects.

Examples of successful, robust community outreach in our state, include Puget Sound Sage's climate equity community-based participatory research,[15] the Climate Equity Task Force and public participation for the King County Strategic Climate Action Plan 2020 Update.[16]

There are emerging frameworks from statewide environmental justice efforts, such as the newly released report from Front and Centered, "Accelerating a Just Transition in Washington State,"[17] exploring the intersection of governance, regenerative economics and community power.

The EJTF developed a detailed set of public participation guidelines and recommendations. There must be a commitment to fully fund and develop the enabling tools and strategies and take a ground-up approach to the design, adoption and implementation of our state's energy policies.

In addition, state and local governments must continue intentional and thoughtful engagement with Tribal governments to understand the different ways Tribes approach their relationship with energy. Steps must be taken to ensure meaningful outreach and opportunity for participation by all of Washington's Tribes. In addition to direct engagement with Tribal staff and leaders, organizations such as the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, the Association of Washington Tribes and the National Congress of American Indians are valuable entities with which to collaborate on climate and energy issues.

Among other factors, for Tribes the design and implementation of Washington's energy policy must strengthen sovereignty. Planning efforts conducted by Tribes can help inform the actions of other governments. Examples include the Spokane Tribe's climate action plan,[18] the Makah Tribe's renewable energy plan[19] and climate resilience plan[20] and the Quinault Indian Nation's climate resilience plan.[21]

A crucial component of ensuring meaningful engagement in the clean energy transition is providing the technical, financial and human resources for community participation. This includes planning, evaluating and implementing energy and resilience projects that meet the unique needs

[15] "Powering the Transition: Community Priorities for a Renewable and Equitable Future" (Puget Sound Sage, 2020), https://www.pugetsoundsage.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/PugetSoundSage_PoweringTransition_June2020-1.pdf.

[16] Matt Kuharic, Jamie Stroble, and Lara Whitley Binder, "King County 2020 Strategy Climate Plan" (King County, 2020).

[17] "Front and Centered Approach to Equitable Greenhouse Gas Reduction in Washington State" (Front and Centered, 2020), https://frontandcentered.org/accelerating-just-transition-in-wa-state/.

[18] "Sustainable Community Master Plan" (Spokane Tribe of Indians, 2013), https://spokanetribe.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/FINAL_2015_SCMP.pdf.

[19] RobertLynette, John Wade, and Larry Coupe, "Comprehensive Renewable Energy Feasibility Study for the Makah Indian Tribe," March 31, 2005, https://doi.org/10.2172/850362.

[20] "Makah Tribe – 2017 Project," accessed November 1, 2020, https://www.energy.gov/indianenergy/makah-tribe-2017-project.

[21] "DOE Assists Quinault Indian Nation with Plans for a Climate-Resilient Community," Energy.gov, 2016, https://www.energy.gov/indianenergy/articles/doe-assists-quinault-indian-nation-plans-climate-resilient-community.

of the state's diverse communities. Policy makers must identify and amend laws and rules, remove barriers and change systems that prevent equitable and just participation in policy choices and be comprehensive in determining the costs and benefits of implementing those policies.

The process to develop the recommendations in the 2021 State Energy Strategy was conducted with stakeholder and public engagement and input. Most notably, the process was informed by consultation with many technical experts and a 27-person Advisory Committee designated by the Legislature and including, among others, legislators, government officials and representatives of civic organizations, energy and utility businesses, as well as public interest advocates. Meaningful community outreach and participation was limited due to a compressed schedule and limited in-person opportunities due to the global pandemic. More robust participation needs to occur in the implementation of the strategy.

ACTION

- Incorporate community participation as a part of the design, adoption and implementation of policies flowing from the state energy strategy across all levels of government, ensuring the availability of the financial, technical and human resources necessary to meaningful involvement by those historically underrepresented.

TABLE 1. SEVEN-STEP PROCESS FOR BUILDING EQUITY INTO CLEAN ENERGY POLICIES[22]

Equitable Policy Design	Highlights and Priorities
1. Ensure equitable access to economic benefits and opportunity by empowering communities.	Support participatory processes, direct funding, removal of barriers to autonomy and independence and greater access to processes and decisions.
2. Ensure universal and equitable access to affordable remote service options.	Efforts must be expanded to develop affordable, quality broadband, including in rural and under-resourced areas.
3. Center program design on reduction of energy cost burdens.	Reduce home energy and transportation costs for highly impacted populations by focusing on cost burden as a metric in planning.
4. Incorporate health disparity metrics into energy planning.	Improve health and safety, safeguard against health and safety risks and improve access to the physical, service and social conditions linked to health and well-being by operationalizing a health disparity metric in energy planning.[23]
5. Increase resilience and energy sovereignty for Tribes and energy independence for vulnerable communities.	Support the efforts of communities especially prone to instability from climate change and other natural disasters, such as communities located in the Cascadia Subduction Zone and wildfire prone areas and communities impacted by fossil fuels.[24]
6. Address procedural inequities in program design and prioritize equitable development.	Perhaps the most significant combined equity-and-energy gains can be made through planning. The state has an opportunity to help guide clean and equitable development of programs and funding that support development.
7. Address nexus issues of affordable housing, livable communities and displacement in energy policy.	Work with housing policy experts to address unhoused and displaced communities through energy policy design, especially focusing on cost burdens.

Source: Washington State Department of Commerce

[22] Kuharic, Stroble, and Binder, "King County 2020 Strategy Climate Plan." p. 173.

[23] "How Do Neighborhood Conditions Shape Health? An Excerpt from Making the Case for Linking Community Development and Health" (Center on Social Disparities in Health, Build Healthy Places Network, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2015), https://www.buildhealthyplaces.org/content/uploads/2015/09/How-Do-Neighborhood-Conditions-Shape-Health.pdf.

[24] "Resilient Washington Subcabinet Report" (Washington Military Department's Emergency Management Division, 2017), https://mil.wa.gov/asset/5ba420648fb16.

4. Prioritize Energy Resiliency as Part of Energy Policy and Planning

Climate change exacerbates and worsens the impacts of natural disasters: sea-level rise, floods, heat waves, extreme weather, increased wildfires and infectious diseases. Planning for these events goes hand-in-hand with clean energy planning. Both involve the siting and construction of new transportation and energy infrastructure and investments in the social infrastructure and social safety net.

These investments make public and community institutions resilient. However, there is always the temptation to wait until a crisis happens before doing anything about it. Preparation should be by design, not in response to disaster. Resiliency must be prioritized as part of upfront energy planning. Communities must be sufficiently resourced to design, plan, prepare and implement resiliency measures.

ACTION

- Incorporate energy resiliency in policy design and energy planning.

> Energy policy must be informed by local knowledge, meet local needs and be accepted as legitimate by local communities.

5. Embed Equity in the Design of Clean Energy Policies and Programs

Figure 5 and Table 1 outline a seven-step process for building equity into clean energy policies and programs. The applicability of each step to any one particular energy policy or program may vary. However, it is useful to evaluate every clean energy policy and program using these metrics to ensure equitable policy and programmatic design.

Another way to ensure that a policy or program is equitably designed is to evaluate it by the three dimensions of energy and environmental justice: 1) structural equity; 2) procedural equity; and 3) distributional equity as described in Figure 4.[25] These three dimensions are foundational to environmental justice work and help focus policy design on equitable outcomes for communities. Each dimension requires distinct strategies to be achieved.

ACTION

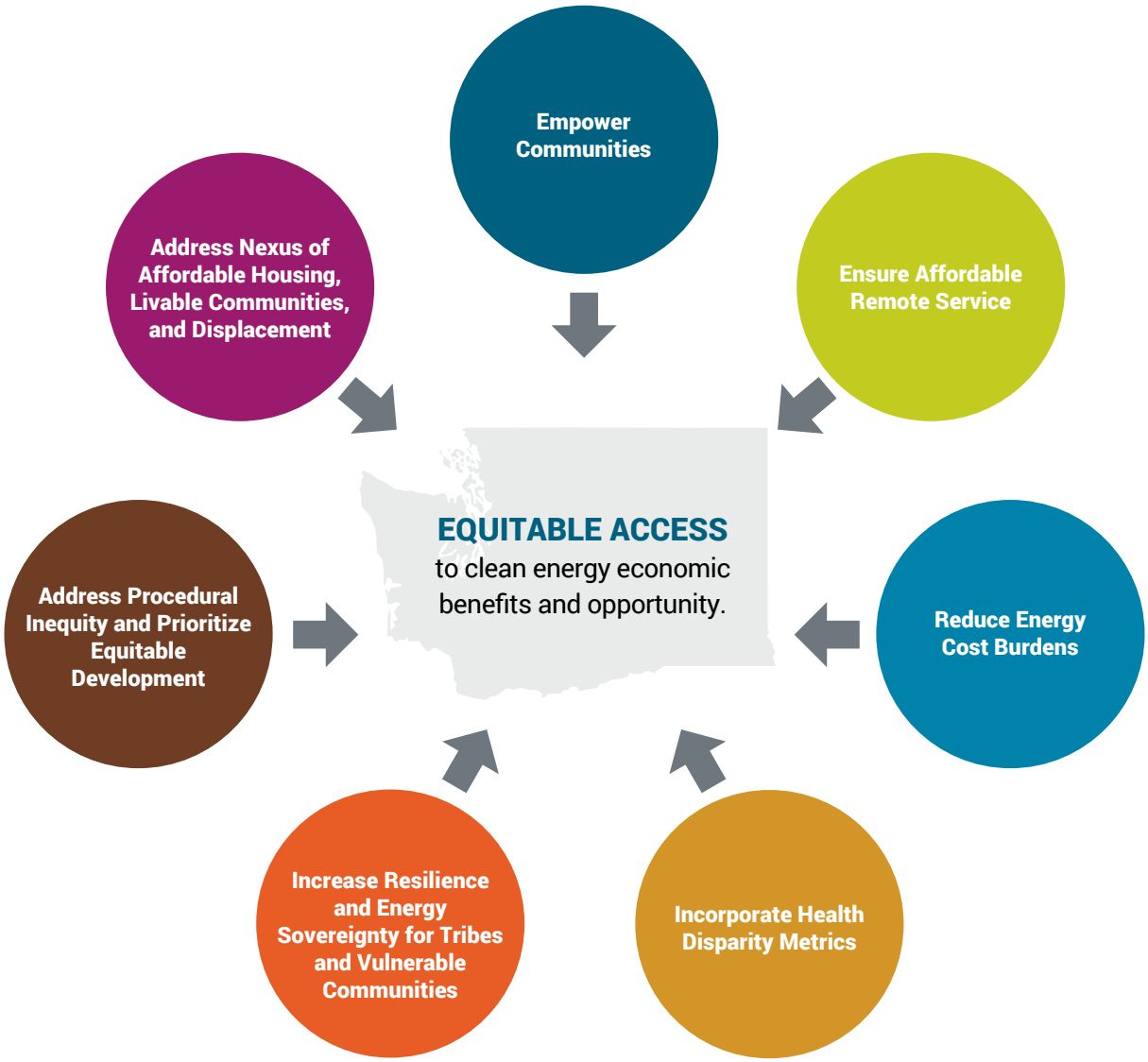
- Governments need to evaluate proposed and existing policies using a framework for equitable policy design and ensuring meaningful engagement in policy design and implementation by those affected. Local communities and advocacy organizations in turn need to hold policy makers and government officials accountable when policies fail to meet these criteria.

FIGURE 4. THREE DIMENSIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE WORK

PROCEDURAL	■ Create processes that are transparent, fair and inclusive in developing and implementing any program, plan or policy ■ Ensure that all people are treated openly and fairly ■ Increase the civic engagement opportunities of communities that are disproportionately impacted by climate change
DISTRIBUTIONAL	■ Fairly distribute resources, benefits and burdens ■ Prioritize resources for communities that experience the greatest inequities, disproportionate impacts and have the greatest unmet needs
STRUCTURAL	■ Make a commitment to correct past harms and prevent future unintended consequences ■ Address the underlying structural and institutional systems that are the root causes of social and racial inequities

[25] Tina Yuen et al., "Guide to Equitable, Community-Driven Climate Preparedness Planning" (Urban Sustainability Directors Network, RAIM + Associates, May 2017), https://www.usdn.org/uploads/cms/documents/usdn_guide_to_equitable_community-driven_climate_preparedness-_high_res.pdf.

FIGURE 5. BUILD AN EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE CLEAN ECONOMY



Source: Washington State Department of Commerce