New York Battery and Energy Storage Technology Consortium, Inc.

Strategy for Community Partnerships and Equitable Energy Storage Deployment

December 6, 2024

Energy storage is critical to achieving state and federal climate and equity goals. In New York State, that includes the mandate of transitioning to a 100% zero-emissions grid by 2040. Community and societal acceptance of energy storage will be critical to achieve these goals and grow the energy storage industry. Developers should ensure that energy storage projects are built thoughtfully to deliver both local and regional benefits to local communities and maximize community acceptance. This document provides guidance and describes best practices in community engagement for equitable growth of the energy storage industry.

This document includes the following sections:

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I. Principles of Equitable Energy Storage

To support equitable deployment of energy storage systems developers should strive to embrace the following eight principles:

1. **Partnership: Ensure meaningful community participation.**
   The transition to clean energy offers an opportunity to create a more equitable energy system. Developers should ensure communities have a say as to what this transition looks like in their neighborhoods, including when it comes to clean energy project siting. Further, developers should work with community partners to minimize any negative impacts of new projects while maximizing local benefits. Self-determination and meaningful participation in project design is key to successful implementation and a healthy relationship between developers and communities.

2. **Affordability: Help reduce electricity bills.**
   Nationwide, there are areas experiencing an energy affordability crisis. In New York State approximately 25% of residents are energy-cost burdened, paying more than 6% of income toward energy bills. Developers should work with utility partners and RTOs to strive to build projects that help reduce system costs and direct savings towards those most vulnerable to high energy prices where possible.

3. **Resiliency: Support grid reliability and emergency services.**
   As climate change intensifies it is critical to ensure communities have access to electricity, particularly during emergency events caused by climate change or system failures. Notably, those hit first and worst by these events have historically been underserved communities. Developers should strive to build projects that support the grid during times of stress and explore opportunities to provide backup power for communities in the event of a blackout.

4. **Sustainability: Maximize emissions reductions and air quality improvements.**
   Air quality and associated health burdens from existing electricity infrastructure can be a significant issue, particularly in densely populated urban areas. Developers should strive to optimize project sites to maximize improvements in local air quality by reducing reliance on fossil-fueled power plants during times of peak demand.

5. **Safety: Prioritize community safety at all times.**
   Developers should only use products that have undergone multiple levels of safety certification and work closely with local authorities to ensure each installation is designed according to established Codes and Standards. In New York this includes stringent safety requirements and extensive emergency response planning. Developers and project owners should provide ample resources to the first responder community and maintain connectivity throughout the project's lifecycle. Developers and project owners should ensure that the facility is appropriately maintained per the requirements of the Codes and Standards throughout the construction, operation, and decommissioning of the project.

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6. **Local investment: Promote local economic development and uplift neighborhood organizations.**
   Developers should strive to be a good neighbor by partnering with local businesses and community organizations to promote economic development. This can include working with local vendors and hiring locally. Career mentoring, job training internships, and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) programming with local organizations can provide real world connectivity to projects and developers and can help maintain long-term relationships in the community once the project becomes operational.

7. **Supply chain responsibility: Build long-lasting installations with sustainably- and humanely-sourced materials.**
   An extractive fossil fuel system should not be replaced with an extractive clean energy system. To the extent possible, developers should strive to use products built with materials that are sustainably and humanely sourced.

8. **Workforce leadership: Build a company that values and reflects diversity.**
   Developers should create an equitable and inclusive hiring policy, and work to bring people from historically under-represented demographics and neighborhoods into the clean energy fold. This includes supporting comprehensive outreach, recruitment, hiring, training and retention programs tailored to under-represented demographics to drive an inclusive and diverse workforce.

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II. Best Practices for Community Partnerships

Motivation

Historically, low-income communities and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) communities have disproportionately borne the burden of energy infrastructure siting, contributing to significant disparities in air quality, health outcomes, and quality of life. While inequities persist, recent efforts in energy siting, development, and operation are working to ensure a more equitable and just energy future. Today, we have the opportunity to transition from an extractive, fossil-based energy system to one that is not only carbon-free, but also actively addresses long-standing environmental burdens on historically marginalized communities, uplifting them and giving them a voice in the clean energy transition.

The shift toward Environmental Justice (EJ) and community participation has been gaining traction in the national narrative around clean energy. For example, the White House Justice40 initiative aims to counter decades of disinvestment in EJ communities and is being implemented with significant community input. In New York, the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (Climate Act) and Scoping Plan include a strong focus on equity and were shaped in partnership with EJ and advocacy organizations.

Aside from the ethical motivation to prioritize equity and inclusion in project development, prioritizing community partnerships is also a good business decision. By building trust with community partners and including neighborhood voices in the site design process as much as possible, developers will de-risk projects and avoid situations where community opposition generates negative publicity or slows development.

In the words of one EJ activist**, "community members have the power to kill a project or be its stewards."** Community leaders that have good experiences with developers may also be able to connect the company with new business opportunities in the future. On the flip side, community leaders that have bad experiences may move to block future projects or advance unlawful local moratoria.

Two key components of a developer's plan for community partnerships include (1) conducting a listening tour, and (2) developing a Public Participation Plan.

1. Listening Tour

Listening can help developers understand the perspectives of host communities and see energy storage installations through their eyes. Using this lens, developers are more likely to be able to build projects in a way that brings the community on the clean energy journey, rather than in opposition to it. Not everything proposed by the community may be doable, but understanding community perspectives should benefit the energy storage industry.

A Listening Tour should begin with background research so developers can be as informed

as possible *before* setting up introductory conversations with local community leaders.

a. Background Research

The first step for productive community engagement is understanding community concerns. In general, communities tend to want access to affordable, secure, and clean/healthy energy while improving, or at least not negatively impacting, quality of life. Below is a list of common community concerns that developers should be aware of when beginning their background research:

- Air pollution and health: Stationary sources of pollution such as power plants and industrial facilities negatively impact air quality and, in some cases, water and soil quality. These polluting facilities pose environmental justice concerns for frontline communities that already have higher baseline rates of health conditions, poor housing quality, and less healthcare access. Adverse health outcomes related to pollution are concentrated in low-income communities and communities of color. Understandably, this often leads to heightened concern around the impact of future projects. Urban EJ organizations are focused on replacing in-city power plants with clean energy generation and storage and ensuring that past sites of fossil fuel infrastructure transportation and combustion are appropriately environmentally remediated. Rural and suburban communities may be more concerned with the potential for accidents at an energy storage facility that result in toxic exposures for people and/or the surrounding environment.
- Affordability: High utility bills are consistently a top concern, particularly as the cost of transitioning to clean energy is incorporated into rates. Programs for economic support and bill credits for vulnerable populations can help address these burdens and are important community incentives.
- Jobs: Communities often want investment in local green workforce training and job access, particularly “green-collar” jobs that are local, well-paid, union-backed, and are not just limited to construction jobs.
- Resiliency: Communities commonly want grid stability, backup power and services during blackouts, particularly for critical facilities and buildings with vulnerable residents.
- Land use: Some communities are concerned about the amount of infrastructure built in their neighborhoods (power plants, waste transfer stations, highways, etc.) and don’t want to continue to be “sacrifice zones” for the greater public good. For communities that have been disproportionately burdened by energy projects, urban EJ organizations state that any new energy infrastructure should be: equitably sited and planned with the input of the community; economically beneficial to local residents/businesses; not exclusively sited in low-income communities; and not built at the expense of community needs (e.g. green space). Urban EJ organizations are also focused on combating gentrification and ensuring new clean energy projects support the local community without leading to increased displacement. In rural and suburban areas, concerns may

stem from shouldering the burden of infrastructure for the benefit of distant cities (such as the construction of reservoirs for New York City water consumption), or from real or perceived competition between energy infrastructure and agricultural land uses. Rural communities may also be concerned about negative impacts on quality-of-life issues such as landscapes and natural environments, view sheds, and property values.

- Safety: Concerns about battery safety are paramount. Community members often cite lack of communication and transparency from energy storage developers about safety as a major cause for opposing a project. Since most people first hear about lithium-ion batteries via a headline about a fire, more education and outreach is needed to prevent/combat misinformation. Community members often reach out to local first responders with questions or concerns about energy storage projects, so developers would benefit from creating positive relationships with first responders early in the project's development.
- Supply chain: Some community members cite concerns that mining for raw materials in the battery supply chain is unsustainable and exploitative, and are interested in exploring alternative battery technologies that do not rely on conflict minerals. Responsible planning for end-of-life recycling and supporting circularity in the supply chain is also a commonly cited concern.
- Community participation and empowerment: Most communities express a desire for self-determination, e.g. participating in decision-making around energy infrastructure in their towns and neighborhoods. Some EJ organizations have cited trauma from past instances of clean energy companies doing more harm than good, suggesting that developers should learn about and respect these dynamics, take the time to get to know the community's history and current needs, and develop transparent mechanisms to demonstrate how community wishes are incorporated.

Because every community is different, all community engagement planning should begin by familiarizing oneself with the history and needs of the neighborhood surrounding the proposed battery project, as well as community desires as expressed by advocacy organizations and in existing neighborhood plans. This can include the following steps:

1. Identify whether the host community is considered an EPA Disadvantaged Community, and/or a Disadvantaged Community as defined by the state. (example: New York State defined Disadvantaged Community)
2. Identify whether the community is served by an EJ organization, and if so, learn about the priorities of that organization. (example: NYC Environmental Justice Alliance)
3. Identify relevant organizations or community groups that serve the area, such as those focused on environment/conservation, agriculture, hunting/fishing, social justice, faith, labor, community-building, youth empowerment, mutual aid, or other prominent or well-regarded organizations in the community.

4. Identify the relevant Community Board, local elected officials, and local fire departments and first responders and learn about their priorities.
5. Identify and read the municipality's land use plans and policies.

b. Preparing for First Impressions

Lining up meetings with key community leaders to build support for the project prior to a public hearing is paramount. If a public hearing is the first time the community learns about the project, there is a much higher possibility that fear and misinformation will yield immediate opposition. Prior to setting up any meetings, however, developers should spend time developing preliminary informational materials that address the following:

- FAQ about the battery technology being selected for use;
- Brochure on how the project can support *local* policy and quality of life goals, informed by the background research conducted in part (a) above;
- Information on potential fiscal impacts to the community (additional funding for schools, vital infrastructure, etc.) as well as potential utility rate impacts;
- Factsheets on the safety of the equipment and design, including overview of Federal and State Code compliance, Emergency Response Plans, local fire department training, etc.;
- Case studies of similar project success stories;
- Outline the project development process, with timeline estimates and indication of points of opportunity for community involvement;
- Communication plan tailored to the local region, including for use in local newspapers, town social media, etc.;
- Website and/or social media page with easy access to the above materials.

It also is prudent to hire a local attorney skilled in land use planning to opine on the local permitting pathways, as well as a qualified energy storage fire safety consultant that can provide guidance on Fire Code compliance in advance of meeting with local leaders. However, developers should be careful not to represent the project as "set in stone" prior to meeting with local leaders for the first time, but instead signal a willingness for collaboration.

c. Key Contacts

Once the background research and materials preparations are complete, developers should set up conversations with local leaders to better understand the history and priorities of the community, understand community concerns, and explore opportunities for collaboration. In some cases, it may be worth asking the landowner for suggestions on key community contacts and priorities. Outreach could include:

1. **Environmental or EJ organization leaders.** Communities that are served by an environmental or EJ organization may be the most plugged into the energy transition conversation and the most likely to respond positively to a proposed energy storage site. These organizations may be able to help serve as anchors

of coalition-building in support of the project.

2. **Other local organization leaders.** Developers should consider reaching out to leaders of local Community Development Corporations, Chambers of Commerce, Business Improvement Districts, and Merchant Associations**.** Even if the organization doesn't have a climate/environmental lens, if they are active in the community they may be more likely to notice a new project. A one-on-one allows for the opportunity to teach about the importance of energy storage, learn about community priorities, and address questions or concerns preemptively.
3. **Local and State elected officials.** Elected officials have significant sway in whether a community supports or opposes a project. If the elected officials campaigned on climate, sustainability, or resiliency, they may be particularly helpful in building support for the project in its earliest stages. Elected officials may also be more supportive of projects when they are presented with a pro-business, pro-development, or pro-labor lens. Developers should reach out to local elected officials proactively, before the project site and design is finalized, and ensure open communication channels throughout the project development process.
4. **Discretionary Permitting Entities.** Early-stage meetings with the Fire Department and/ or the Local Ambulance Corps, Town/Planning Board, etc., can provide guidance to developers in terms of prior projects (what was approved, who was involved, the hierarchy of local roles, and what to expect once a project becomes public.) These early meetings can also inform a local outreach schedule to entities involved in the approval process, as well as to local advocacy groups.
5. **Fire Marshalls, Chiefs, & Departments.** Early-stage meetings and training for volunteer and/or small fire departments prior to permitting can be an important tool to alleviate legitimate questions about a department's ability to address a fire event. These are respected and trusted members of local communities, and investing a small amount of resources in training ahead of permitting can go a long way to creating trusted messengers that can say that they feel confident and prepared in handling a fire event.
6. **Community Boards and Neighborhood Associations.** Attending and presenting a high-level deck about the benefits of energy storage at a local Community Board, Homeowners Association (HOA), or other civic or neighborhood organization meeting offers an opportunity to gauge community interest, answer questions, and understand potential concerns before the project location is announced. This can help combat misinformation and reduce fear of a new technology people may not have heard of before. Community Board or organization members may also be able to introduce you to other key community leaders for follow-up meetings.
7. **Religious leaders.** If there is an active faith-based organization in the community, it may benefit developers to reach out and gauge interest in an informational meeting. For example, churches often hold community meetings and reach an extensive audience, making them effective at disseminating

information across a neighborhood. Religious leaders may be less likely to be available by phone, but an in-person meeting could demonstrate a developer's commitment to building community relationships.

8. **Other community organizations and leaders.** Local leaders that have established trust with their communities can connect you with other community leaders, supporting a "distributed organizing" approach. The previous steps may lead to new connections and insight into which leaders should be made aware of a developer's interest in building in the neighborhood prior to finalizing development plans.
9. **Neighbors ("abutters") of the project.** It is imperative that developers proactively reach out to the neighbors of the installation itself, including abutting residences, businesses, and institutions. Neighbors are the most impacted by the new construction and may be the most likely to be opposed to the project. Proactive and frequent communication can help ensure neighbors feel heard and that they have an outlet to address their concerns directly with the developer. This can help avoid coalition-building in opposition to the project.

d. Discussion Questions

Once key contacts have been identified, developers should tailor relevant presentation materials and discussion questions to each contact. Questions could include, for example:

- How familiar are you and your constituents with the role of energy storage in the clean energy transition, and the local benefits of energy storage such as increased resiliency, reinvigorated economic development, etc.?
- What might your organization and/or constituents be most excited about when it comes to energy storage in your neighborhood(s)? What concerns exist?
- How might we enhance our projects to deliver additional benefits to local communities (recognizing that what is possible will vary by project site)?
- What suggestions do you have on the best way to engage community members in this municipality to discuss potential project opportunities?
- What questions do you have about our company or about energy storage more broadly?
- Do you have any other feedback for us regarding potential projects or our community outreach strategy?

Cultivating personal relationships with key members of the community should provide developers with an "ear on the ground," helping them proactively respond if and when support or opposition to the project forms. By having several layers of support from various stakeholder entities, developers can quickly identify places or people where concerns are emerging and address them expeditiously.

2. Public Participation Plan

Once the Listening Tour is complete, developers could consider developing a Public Participation Plan. The term “Public Participation Plan”, as used in New York Senate Bill S3211B, signals a stronger level of commitment to transparency and public engagement than “Community Relations Plan,” a term which may be interpreted to reflect the company’s intent to pacify community opposition, rather than to create trusting relationships with community representatives.

Key values that developers should strive to uphold during the design and execution of the Plan include:

- **Inclusion.** Start outreach early and before finalizing plans to pursue development on the site. Outreach should be grounded in a process of community self-determination and informed consent.
- **Respectful curiosity.** Learn from local organizations about community priorities and give respect to existing community plans. Ask questions and be a strong listener, rather than assuming what is best for the community.
- **Local partnership.** Partner with community institutions that already have connections and trust to plan and publicize public feedback events. Consider hiring local community organizations as facilitators if appropriate.
- **Transparency.** Be clear about what is within the developer’s capacity and provide transparent explanations of limiting factors (e.g. technical, regulatory, and financial constraints). Build trust by publishing engagement materials and summaries of community exchanges on your website.
- **Accessibility.** Ensure all public language is accessible, including by sharing information in multiple languages and methods (e.g. digital and printed). Provide contact information so the community can reach you.
- **Accountability.** Provide the community with clear project and feedback timelines as well as opportunities for follow-up.

Developers should create and maintain an “Outreach Database”, with contact information for all entities involved in the approval process, community groups, and people/organizations in the neighborhood surrounding the proposed project site. The Database should also specify who within the company will be the point person for each government or community contact.

Key components of the Public Participation Plan could include detailing strategies for (a) outreach, (b) public meetings, (c) opportunities for feedback, and (d) demonstration of how feedback was incorporated. Developers should be aware of the lack of community capacity in many areas, such as in jurisdictions where elected officials and first responders are part-time or volunteer-based, and adjust the Participation Plan accordingly.

(a) Outreach: The Public Participation Plan should leverage findings from the

Listening Tour to lay out specific goals for the outreach strategy and the steps to achieve them, including mobilizing the right people, partners, and resources in support of the project. This section of the Plan should reference the Outreach Database and lay out an approximate timeline for outreach in relation to key development milestones. Conducting extensive one-on-one meetings before "going public" is likely to be beneficial because it allows developers a way to assess and prepare for the primary touch points of concerns in a private setting. Based on these one-on-one conversations, it may then be appropriate to partner with local organizations to help publicize the proposed project and any relevant community meetings. Developers could include a media strategy in the Plan, such as creating digital and printed materials that community partners can use to help publicize key events. Members of the media should have a project contact that is available at any time to respond to questions or concerns. The outreach strategy should be managed on a daily basis until there is a strong sense of community support.

(b) Public meetings: The Public Participation Plan should specify details relating to any public meetings associated with the proposed project. Developers could consider committing to at least two public meetings for each municipality with a proposed project. These can be hosted in partnership with a range of community organizations to reach a broader audience and begin to build a coalition of support for the project. Additional details in the Plan could include:

(i) *Messaging strategy*: Language should be in layperson format (and accessible to someone new to the energy space), and should reflect community priorities learned from the Listening Tour. For example, some communities may be more receptive to a framing around climate change; others may respond more to messaging around energy independence or economic development.

(ii) *Translations*: Work with community partners to identify whether public meeting materials need to be made available in multiple languages and/or whether live translation is required for a successful event. (This map is a useful resource for NYC developers in identifying top 10 languages by Council District.)

(iii) *Presentation*: Developers could consider a range of event styles, from a standard PowerPoint presentation with Q&A, to a more dynamic "open house" event where experts lead small groups around a series of posters with key images and information. Topics for presentation could include:

(1) Background on the clean energy transition;
(2) Examples of projects already operating with referrals of people who can vouch for the systems in these communities;
(3) Technical and community benefits of energy storage including increased reliability, reduced utility costs, and positive economic impacts;
(4) Detailed safety considerations, Codes and Standards, and planning;

(5) Overview of the parameters within which the developer operates, including priorities/limitations for site selection, technical feasibility, market/economic considerations, etc., to provide an educational framing for possibilities and limitations for community input;
(6) Site-specific opportunities and explanation of key limitations;
(7) Broader energy justice initiatives where applicable (see Section III).

(iv) *Q&A*: Developers should be prepared to dedicate significant time for Q&A and have talking points prepared to address tough questions without sounding defensive, particularly when it comes to safety. Developers should prepare in advance to ensure subject matter experts and local advocates are present at the meeting to provide third party validation.

(v) *Facilitated feedback session*: Developers could consider providing breakout sessions, perhaps with facilitators hired from local community partner organizations and/or external consulting companies, to collect more specific feedback on community concerns, project design, or other relevant considerations.

(vi) *Venue*: The venue space should be accessibly located in the community in an existing gathering space. Exact venues could be chosen in consultation with community partners, but could include a school, community or religious center, arts theater, library, or outdoor green space. Some community allies may offer to host the event in their space.

(vii) *Refreshments plan*: Providing food and refreshments at the community event is a good way to attract attendance and start conversations off on the right foot. Developers could plan to source refreshments from a restaurant or small business in the community.

(c) Opportunities for feedback: The Public Participation Plan should include a strategy for continued community feedback after any public events. This could include an online survey form and/or a dedicated email and phone number where public comments can be collected. Developers could consider means to encourage participation from local residents and prioritize their comments. A clear timeline for public feedback opportunities should be made available.

(d) Explanation of how feedback was (or wasn't) incorporated: The Public Participation Plan should include a strategy to share the feedback received and how it was addressed with the community. Developers can build trust by fully documenting community engagement interactions and publishing materials summarizing the outcomes on their website. Developers could also consider providing written explanations to local leaders on why/how feedback was or was not incorporated into project design.

3. Site Design and Related Programming

To some extent, developers have flexibility in determining locations to site batteries. Key attributes that have historically driven this decision-making include:

- Interconnection to the grid
- Wholesale or retail market signals
- Available land parcels
- Environmental attributes or contamination
- PPA options for energy off-takers
- Entitlement process
- Financing
- End of life planning
- Brownfield sites

To proactively address community concerns, developers should also be sensitive to picking sites that have the highest probability for success. This process should include reviewing, for example:

- Community character (e.g. climate policies, economic development policies, industrial history, etc.)
- Current land use of the site
- Environmental features (wetlands, waterbodies, state or federally listed species, etc.)
- Abutting land uses / sensitivities
- Economic climate or "temperature" of the community where the project is being considered
- Jurisdiction's permitting approvals and timing
- Zoning characteristics and process
- Fire Department and characteristics (e.g. volunteer vs municipal; level of understanding of battery storage and safety in first responder activities)

When feasible, energy storage projects should be designed to maximize positive community engagement and acceptance. Design options will necessarily be highly site-specific, should always prioritize safety, and ideally would consider community input, but could include:

- Green space: Particularly in dense, urban environments, communities may be additionally supportive of projects that provide outdoor gathering space, appealing landscaping, and/or an area for community gardening in partnership with a local organization. In suburban/rural communities, sites that offer ample screening and maintain tree coverage are highly encouraged and regarded.
- Art or other aesthetic considerations: Developers could partner with local artists or youth organizations to make the installation and/or surrounding fencing feel inclusive and aesthetically pleasing.
- Informational signage: If allowed by local code, developers could include posters or other signage with information about the clean energy transition and the ways

that energy storage contributes to the local community's priorities (e.g. air quality, energy independence, etc.). For installations in more heavily trafficked areas, developers could consider hosting a bulletin board for community announcements in partnership with local organizations to make any fencing feel more inclusive.

- Resiliency: Backup power during blackouts may be popular in communities that experience more frequent outages. Developers could consider pursuing projects that could provide community services during a blackout, such as Wi-Fi, cell service, public outlets, or a community refrigerator for sensitive medications.
- Electric Vehicle (EV) charging: While communities react differently to EV charging infrastructure, developers could consider whether chargers for Light Duty Vehicles (LDV), Medium- and Heavy-Duty Vehicles (MHDV), or e-bikes would be well-received by the community as an add-on to the energy storage system (ESS) installation. Notably, in dense urban areas, LDV chargers may be less popular given existing concerns about increased traffic congestion, while MHDV chargers may be more popular to combat air pollution. Safe e-bike charging and storage solutions may be especially desirable in areas with high concentrations of people who rely on e-bikes for their work.

Developers should also consider ways to continue to keep the community engaged before, during, and after the site is built. This could include:

a. School partnerships: Developers could reach out to nearby schools to plan classroom visits and site tours to engage students in thinking critically about the clean energy transition and the role of energy storage.
    i. Developers could consider funding a STEM and/or clean energy program within the local school or youth organization.
    ii. Developers could consider hiring a Teach for America fellow or a local graduate student to design and host workshops for students and/or the public.
    iii. Developers could consider a program to train local teachers to incorporate energy storage into their existing curriculum and offer supporting site visits.
    iv. Developers could consider a mentoring or internship program for high school or undergraduate students to learn about green jobs.
    v. Developers could commit to yearly site tours to local classes and environmental clubs in neighboring schools once the project is built.
b. Community partnerships: Developers could reach out to nearby community and faith-based organizations to offer presentations and / or site visits geared toward the organization's audience.
c. Open houses: Developers could host periodic open houses, particularly at sites with extra gathering space, where staffers / interns are available to speak with the public about the installation and distribute educational materials, snacks, and other goodies.

d. Website: Developers could consider publishing on their website:
    i. Educational materials and animated videos to explain how energy storage works and its role in the clean energy transition.
    ii. A map page that shows where their completed project sites are located and what co-benefits are available at each site. If appropriate, developers could also request permission from any community partner organizations that have supported co-benefits at a site (e.g. a mural or community garden) to add their name to the map as well.
    iii. An equity page that describes the principles for equitable energy storage development and provides more information on efforts in support of each one.
e. Referrals: Developers could consider leveraging their presence in a community to promote more opportunities for local renewables and energy efficiency by, for example, providing resources for neighbors to pursue clean energy projects on their property.

By designing the site and related programming in a way that maximizes community benefits, developers are more likely to solidify local support for the project and ensure a healthy relationship with the community over the life of the project.

III. Opportunities to support systemic energy justice

1. Energy Affordability

Nationwide households are facing an energy affordability crisis. A 2024 study by the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy (ACEEE) found that a quarter of low-income households in the United States spend more than 15% of income on energy bills. In New York State, 25% of households pay more than 6% of income on energy bills, exceeding the 6% State threshold for energy cost burden. Developers should strive to design projects that help reduce energy bills for energy cost burdened residents and/or small, locally owned businesses.

New York State examples of how this could be done include the following pathways:

a. Statewide Solar For All (SSFA): Under SSFA, developers of projects <5MW can sell Value of Distributed Energy Resources (VDER) credits back to the utility, at a fixed price ("the Standard Offer"), which has an embedded discount that gets automatically passed on to eligible low-income utility customers. SSFA participation would directly support State energy affordability targets.
b. Co-ownership: Consider exploring community co-ownership of a battery installation, even if this is only a fraction of the project. A precedent for this model is Sunset Park Solar, whereby UPROSE (a community organization) co-owns the project and receives 50% of the revenue from the solar array. Given the high upfront cost of a battery, community organizations may be less likely to want a significant ownership stake, but some level of shared ownership model could help build local wealth and improve community support for the project.

2. Community Investments and Donations

Developers should explore opportunities to donate a portion of revenues back into host communities, considering the following:

a. **Donations should only be granted to organizations with which a developer has built a meaningful relationship and established mutual respect.** Take care to avoid situations that may be framed as a quid pro quo.
b. Donations should reflect an understanding of what the community and/or partner organization wants. Take care not to assume what would be best for the neighborhood.
c. Donations should prioritize uplifting local community leaders and existing programs as well as programs that the community has identified a need for. Community leaders usually have a firm understanding of the needs of their constituents, so it is important that they are a part of the dialogue. This is in line with the understanding that those closest to the problem are also the ones who best understand the solution.
d. Consider in-kind donations such as donating extra space on a lot to a community organization or small business.
e. Consider donating to a community foundation that leverages an inclusive planning process to determine how the money should be spent in the community (supporting the ideal of self-determination). Memberships in local economic organizations, such as a

local Chamber of Commerce or Economic Development Corporation, may provide additional opportunities to partner with and uplift local communities and small businesses.

Note: When it comes to donations to local elected officials, there are strict campaign finance rules that developers must follow. While the Federal Election Commission (FEC) governs federal election campaigns and contribution limits, individual states enforce their own regulation and reporting requirements. More information about New York State contribution limits can be found here. In New York City, additional restrictions apply; see here for more detail.

3. Green Jobs

There is a tremendous opportunity for the clean energy transition to contribute to an inclusive and well-paid energy workforce, particularly for potentially displaced workers in the energy transition and demographics historically underrepresented in the energy sector.

Developers should strive to embrace the concept of "green collar" jobs, which include a range of services and job types not limited to construction jobs. Developers should familiarize themselves with workforce development and pre-apprenticeship programs to identify potential opportunities for collaboration, particularly when it comes to enabling residents of Disadvantaged Communities to access clean energy jobs.

For on-staff hiring, developers could consider partnering with organizations like SolarOne, the RETI Center, or the Civilian Climate Corps in NYC; NENY in Binghamton, NY; or Viridi GreenForce or PUSH Buffalo in Buffalo, NY; EDICT or other organizations with workforce training programs, to help recruit and train candidates from EJ neighborhoods and/or historically underrepresented demographics. In addition to hiring people from underrepresented demographics for more traditional positions, developers could also consider creating new positions focused on equity goals, such as:

- Director of Community Partnerships
    - Compared to "Community Relations" or "External Affairs," **the phrase "Community Partnerships" indicates a deeper level of trust and respect between a company and community members, and a greater commitment to integrated collaboration.**
    - This person would be responsible for building and maintaining relationships with community organizations and local elected officials; identifying and following through on opportunities to build community trust and goodwill; helping to integrate community feedback into projects and programs as appropriate; and overseeing public-facing events.
- Community Fellow
    - This short-term paid position could be made available on a semester-long or seasonal basis to undergraduate students from a community hosting an ESS project.

    - Over the course of the ~10 week fellowship, each fellow could design and propose a community engagement presentation or program tailored to their community's needs. Ideally the Community Partnerships team could provide a weekly educational session to teach fellows more about clean energy systems and markets.
- Product/Project Trainee
    - A training program that supports efforts to build a more diverse workforce and to include historically underrepresented demographics in the clean energy transition, particularly in non-construction jobs.
    - This full-time entry-level position would allow someone with less energy experience to shadow experienced staff members and gain on-the-job training. The training program could last 6-12 months, after which the candidate could be evaluated for promotion.

For contractors, developers could consider pledging to only hire companies that pay prevailing wage and to prioritize Minority and Women Owned Business Enterprises (MWBE) vendors wherever possible, perhaps setting an internal target of percent work completed by MWBE vendors.

4. Supply Chain Considerations

Developers should consider the supply chain implications of the equipment procured for energy storage projects. By choosing domestic and local content, supporting battery recycling, and advocating for a circular energy storage supply chain, developers can improve supply chain security; decrease lead times and costs associated with transportation of equipment (as compared to sourcing equipment internationally), and cultivate positive societal impacts.

Human rights violations and environmental degradation historically associated with the raw materials needed for energy storage development threaten the industry's ability to contribute to an equitable energy transition. Industry, regulators, academia, and other stakeholders must work together to ensure a humane and sustainable supply chain in support of a just transition worldwide. To this end, developers should closely consider the supply chain implications of the equipment they procure for their energy storage projects. By choosing domestic, local, and/or recycled content wherever possible, developers can contribute to a more sustainable and humane supply chain. This has the added benefits of publicly demonstrating commitment to upholding moral values, which can serve to build trust with local communities, and in many cases decreasing lead times and costs associated with transportation of equipment, as compared to procuring products produced internationally.

Procuring domestic and locally manufactured energy storage related equipment and services also supports the local economy and creates high quality job opportunities. According to a 2024 study by the W.E. Upjohn Institute, new battery factories and associated supply chains add approximately 220 jobs for every gigawatt hour of production. This study concludes that over

310,000 new jobs will be needed by 2030 to support the U.S. battery and energy storage supply chain.

5. Walking the Talk

Developers should consider building out a comprehensive Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) policy relating to hiring, training, and staff support. Additional trainings, such as by Race Forward or the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond (Undoing Racism Training), could be useful in helping staff members explore the role of the company in either supporting or hindering broader social goals.

When it comes to uplifting environmental justice, developers could consider encouraging staff to familiarize themselves with the following EJ readings, and/or organize discussion sessions or Lunch & Learns to identify opportunities to integrate equity principles into their work:

- Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing (New Mexico, 1996)
- Foundational Environmental Justice Principles (Washington DC, 1991)
- Principles for Climate Justice (2009)
- The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership (2021)
- Air of Injustice: African Americans & Power Plant Pollution (2002)
- Executive Order 12898: Federal Actions to Address EJ (Clinton, 1994)
- Executive Order 14008: Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad (Biden, 2021)
- Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty (1987-2007)
- More resources at ejnet.org

Finally, developers could consider pursuing B-Corp certification, which would serve as a public commitment to high social and environmental performance.

IV. Resources

NY-BEST formed a BESS (Battery Energy Storage System) Safety and Siting Best Practices Working Group in 2023 to address growing needs in the industry to identify best practices pertaining to Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) safety and siting and permitting. Through the efforts of that working group NY-BEST created a Battery Energy Storage Systems Safety and Best Practices Resource Library. The BESS Safety and Best Practices Resource Library includes a range of resources on BESS safety from introductory information to relevant research, applicable guides and protocols, training resources, and webinars on battery energy storage safety best practices. The library includes resources for both BESS companies, stakeholders and the general public on the importance of safe battery energy storage systems (BESS) and the technology's key role in achieving a clean and reliable energy grid. The BESS safety materials are organized topically with links to each resource.

The NY-BEST BESS Safety and Best Practices Resource Library includes:

- Introductory Battery Energy Storage Resources
- Battery Energy Storage Safety Resources
- Codes and Standards for Battery Energy Storage
- Risk Analysis for Battery Energy Storage
- Emergency Management and Emergency Response Plans for Battery Energy Storage
- Siting and Permitting Resources
- Training on Battery and Energy Storage Systems

V. Glossary

- **Climate justice:** Climate justice means putting equity and human rights at the core of decision-making and action on climate change. United Nations Development Program
- **Co-design:** The process by which nearby community members can participate in the design of a proposed energy project, within relevant spatial, economic, and technical constraints, and particularly with regard to the publicly accessible spaces on-site and/or the project features that may be reasonably included for the benefit of the community.
- **Community-based organization (CBO):** A nonprofit civil society organization that is representative of the community in which it is based (or significant segments of that community) and works to serve people in that community. Activities and services can include healthcare, education, public safety, legal services, youth programs, employment, training, and advocacy. The work of many NYC-based CBOs includes amplifying citizens' voices and mobilizing low- and moderate-income residents to combat societal inequities. (Sources: Cornell Law School, Federal Bureau of Justice Administration, NYS Dept of Health)
- **Disadvantaged Community (DAC):** As defined by the New York State Climate Act, communities that bear burdens of negative public health effects, environmental pollution, impacts of climate change, and possess certain socioeconomic criteria, or comprise high-concentrations of low- and moderate- income households. The Climate Justice Working Group (CJWG) identified DACs to be the 35% of NYS census tracts that scored highest when evaluated by 45 indicators, including:
    - climate-related risks, such as flooding or extreme heat;
    - health vulnerabilities like asthma, COPD, and emergency department visits;
    - socio-economic factors, such as race, ethnicity, and income; and
    - pollution exposures, such as vehicle traffic, PM2.5, and wastewater discharge.

  (Sources: NYS Final Scoping Plan, NYS Draft DAC Criteria)
- **Distributed organizing:** A coordinated but non-hierarchical organizing style that respects and activates the local expertise of member organizations across a geographic region, prioritizing the work being done by subsets or chapters of the central organization. An example of a coalition with a distributed organizing model is NYRenews.
- **Energy democracy:** The notion that communities should have a say and agency in shaping and participating in their energy future. (Source: Initiative for Energy Justice)
- **Energy justice:** The achievement of equity in both the social and economic participation in the energy system, while also remediating social, economic, and health burdens on those historically harmed by the energy system. (Source: Initiative for Energy Justice)
- **Environmental justice (EJ):** The recognition and remediation of the disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on communities of color and low-income communities. The key principles of the movement include fair distribution of the burdens of development, and involvement in all aspects of "the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies." (Source: Initiative for Energy Justice)

- **Environmental Justice (EJ) Area:** As defined by NYC's Environmental Justice law, a low-income community OR a minority community located in NYC. A low-income community is here defined as a census block group where more than 23.59% of residents have an annual income less than the U.S. Census Bureau poverty threshold. A minority community is here defined as a census block group where more than 51.1% of residents are recognized by the U.S. Census Bureau as Hispanic, African-American or Black, Asian and Pacific Islander or American Indian. (Source: NYC Administrative Code, Chapter 10, §3-1001)
- **Frontline community:** The communities experiencing the first and worst of climate change consequences, specifically those most impacted by the energy system and the resulting pollution. Frontline communities include, but are not limited to communities of color, low-income communities, indigenous communities, and communities surrounded by extractive energy production and infrastructure. (Source: Initiative for Energy Justice)
- **Green collar jobs:** A job that includes both lower and higher skilled employment opportunities that directly result in the restoration of the environment, increased energy efficiency, clean energy generation, the creation of high performing buildings and the conservation of natural resources. (Source: DC Office of Planning)
- **Informed consent:** The notion that a developer proposing new energy infrastructure should work to receive approval for the project from the neighboring community, after providing clear and comprehensive information about the benefits, harms, and risks of the project. Originally stemming from a long history of unsanctioned testing of experimental reproductive and medical procedures and vaccinations on people of color, the phrase "informed consent" is included as a core Principle of Environmental Justice.
- **Just transition:** A transition away from the fossil-fuel economy to a new economy that provides "dignified, productive, and ecologically sustainable livelihoods; democratic governance; and ecological resilience." (Source: Initiative for Energy Justice)
- **Self-determination:** The notion that people have the right and responsibility to make decisions about what happens in their communities and neighborhoods. Embracing the concept of self-determination means recognizing residents not just as energy consumers but as decision-makers and implementers in the transition to achieve an energy system that is equitable, sustainable, and democratic.(Sources: Scottish Community Development Initiative, Energy Democracy)

VI. Acknowledgements

NY-BEST would like to acknowledge the contributions of its members who participated on the BESS Safety and Siting Best Practices Working Group in their work to identify best practices pertaining to BESS safety and siting and permitting. We would also like to specifically acknowledge NY-BEST Board Director & Vice Chair, Industry, Kelly Sarber for her contributions pertaining to energy storage community outreach best practices, and NineDot Energy for their support in the development of this resource. Finally, we would like to thank the volunteer reviewers who provided invaluable feedback on the draft stages of this resource:

- Briana Carbajal, State Legislative Manager, WE ACT for Environmental Justice
- Raleigh Dale, Director of Industry Engagement, Greenlight America
- Dieynabou Diallo, Community Impact and Partnerships Manager, NineDot Energy
- Adam Flint, Director of Clean Energy Programs, Network for a Sustainable Tomorrow (NEST)
- Sam Jasinski, Director of Policy and Business Development, New York, New Leaf Energy; NY-BEST Board Director, Industry
- Nadia Pabst, Vice President, Government & Regulatory Affairs, Aypa Power; NY-BEST Board Director, Industry
- Carlos Piedad, Policy Advisor, Environmental Justice, NYC Mayor's Office of Climate & Environmental Justice(MOCEJ)
- Molly Rafelson, Program Director, Energy Storage, The Clean Fight
- Lovinia Reynolds, Associate Manager, The Clean Fight
- Kelly Sarber, CEO/President, Strategic Management Group; NY-BEST Board Director & Vice Chair, Industry
- Arif Ullah, Executive Director, South Bronx Unite
- Camille Warner, Program Manager, Clean Energy Siting, New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA)
- Lydia Wiener, Policy Advisor, Clean Energy, NYC Mayor's Office of Climate & Environmental Justice(MOCEJ)
- Sam Wilt, Policy Analyst, Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)