

# Best Practices for Community Energy Planning in Rural Oregon

Grace Andrews



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# Introduction

## What is energy planning?

An energy plan is a strategic plan created by a local government, community organization, Tribe, or other jurisdiction to guide local decisions related to energy consumption, generation, and conservation. There are different terms for energy plans and related planning efforts; for example, climate action plans often have similar goals to energy plans, though with a more climate-first focus. Resiliency plans, economic plans, and even hazard mitigation plans may have some overlap with energy plans if they feature energy projects, but an energy plan is focused specifically on how a community will use and produce energy in the future. Although all energy plans are different and specific to community needs, they share the following characteristics.

### Key parts of an energy plan

1. An overview of how the community uses energy and how that might change in the future
2. Goals for what future energy use should look like across several topic areas
3. A list of actions and projects to help accomplish those goals

The process of creating an energy plan can seem complicated, but it does not have to be. Learning more about the different types of plans and the different ways to create and implement them can help you understand what approach is best for your community. Every community is different, but that doesn't mean you have to start from scratch. The energy planning movement is growing, and as it grows, more and more resources are being made available for communities that are beginning their energy planning journey.



Photo credit: Sustainable Northwest

## Why should your community adopt an energy plan?

The process of creating the plan is a great way to get your community and local governments talking about their energy priorities. Once a community has established an energy plan, they can start implementing projects and using the plan as a resource for future decision-making. While accomplishing the plan's goals is the main purpose of creating a plan, you will probably see other benefits to the community during the planning process.

### Other benefits to energy planning

- **Being more competitive for grant funding due to a detailed list of projects and goals**
- **Strengthening partnerships between businesses, governments, and community organizations**
- **Municipalities working together more effectively because of clearly defined shared goals**
- **Building a local movement around clean energy and sustainability**

Communities in Oregon have already seen benefits. Hannah Sohl, Executive Director of Rogue Climate, a community organization that created the City of Talent Clean Energy Action Plan, told us, "At Rogue Climate we saw it as a way to build more power. We wanted to show that people in Talent can work together around common themes and shared values. We also hoped it would help to build climate action momentum more broadly."

Becky Brun, a member of the Hood River County Energy Plan Steering Committee and former Hood River city council member, says, "We can point to the amount of money and energy saved, and the number of grants gotten. Now that this plan is policy and we are required to pursue these goals, clean energy projects have become more normalized."

Bridget Callahan, who helped begin the energy planning process for Deschutes County, said about energy planning, "Having a shared vision for a community develops a road map so that when there's opportunities for dollars, communities are prepared and know where to deploy those dollars. They can say: here's where the energy burden is, here's a future resiliency hub, here's where there is wind energy potential."

## How to use this report - and why it exists

There are already multiple step-by-step guides and other resources available about the energy planning process. A favorite of ours is the [United States Department of Energy \(DOE\) Community Energy Strategic Planning Guide](#). That guide and other useful resources are linked in the Resources section of this report, and we encourage you to use them alongside this report.

### In this report you can expect to find:

- **Basic information about each step in the energy planning process**
- **Advice on how to best approach energy planning from a rural perspective**
- **Testimonials from folks who have worked with rural communities to create and implement energy plans**
- **Oregon-specific and up-to-date resources for gathering information and securing funding for energy planning projects**

However, looking at other guides, especially from a rural Oregon perspective, reveals some important knowledge gaps that we hope this report will be able to fill. First, many guides assume that planners are from a large city or use large cities as examples, which means that they assume access to resources and capacity that many smaller communities don't have. This can make the guides difficult to follow at times. Second, the guides are often outdated and missing more recent information about how energy planning as a practice has developed in recent years. The US DOE guide was published in 2013, and a similar guide from the Rocky Mountain Institute was published in 2015, and a lot has changed since then. Third, these guides usually have a more general geographical scope, citing examples from across the country, in order to highlight particularly successful planning processes. For this report, however, we will place our geographical focus on rural Oregon since this guide is meant to be specifically for small cities and counties in Oregon. This focus will allow this report to feature both more relatable stories and advice, as well as specific resources about where to find information and funding.

Throughout this report, we will draw from the experiences of a variety of people that have been or are currently involved in energy planning processes in rural Oregon, most notably in Hood River County, the City of Talent, Deschutes County, and Wallowa County. More than ten people were interviewed about their experiences in energy planning, and you'll hear from each of them in this report. We hope that these personal interviews will provide insight into both the unique challenges that are present in rural energy planning and the exciting solutions that communities are able to arrive at together.

## Energy in rural Oregon - a brief summary

To start on your rural energy planning journey, it can be helpful to understand the current energy landscape in our state. Oregon generates energy from a variety of sources, hydropower being by far the largest. Energy generated from solar and wind has increased in recent years as well, and there is very little fossil fuel energy produced in Oregon. However, that doesn't mean Oregon doesn't use fossil fuel energy. Energy is often imported and exported between states, and the electricity in our homes is usually a mix of sources depending on the utility that supplies it. In addition, we have to consider transportation fuels like gasoline, diesel, and direct use fuels like heating oil and natural gas, which together make up over half of all energy use in Oregon. To learn more about how Oregon uses and produces energy, take a look at the Oregon Department of Energy's [Biennial Energy Report](#).



A large portion of the energy generated in Oregon comes from hydroelectric power plants. Photo credit: Swalley Irrigation District

One important aspect of the energy story in Oregon, especially for communities considering energy planning, are the utilities that supply energy to homes and businesses. There are two main types of utilities in Oregon - investor-owned utilities and consumer-owned utilities. Investor-owned utilities are large corporations that often operate over a large area or in multiple states and control much of the electric grid infrastructure, like power plants and power lines. In Oregon, the three investor-owned electric utilities are Portland General Electric, Pacific Power, and Idaho Power. Natural gas utilities also fall under this category. Consumer-owned or cooperative electric utilities are smaller and serve a more limited, and usually more rural, area. Electric cooperatives in Oregon buy most of their energy from Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), which mostly sells energy produced by hydroelectric dams, while investor-owned utilities source their energy from a variety of power plants and renewable energy projects. To learn more about which utilities serve your area, visit the [ODOE Find Your Utility page](#).

Both types of electric utilities have struggled in recent years with power outages and shutoffs. In rural areas, even a mild storm can sometimes cause outages. Increasingly, dry, hot conditions in the summer months can also cause outages in the form of deliberate shutoffs, called Public Safety Power Shutoffs, to decrease wildfire risk. Power outages are not just inconvenient, for some they can also be dangerous or even life-threatening. Water well pumps, heating and cooling systems, and medical equipment failing because of an outage can leave some of the most vulnerable people in danger. Luckily, small-scale renewables, storage, and generators can all help with outages.

There are significant opportunities for renewable energy development in Oregon, and energy plans often focus on adding renewable generation to the grid in addition to electrifying transportation and increasing energy efficiency. Not every type of renewable generation will work for every community, and they each have their own benefits and challenges. Below is a summary of some of the reasons your community might want to consider each type of energy project, as well as some of the challenges that may come up.

Energy type	Benefits and opportunities	Challenges and drawbacks
Solar panels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy to install and relatively cheap</li> <li>• Sunny Eastern Oregon has lots of solar potential</li> <li>• Can be installed at small, medium, or utility scale</li> <li>• In IOU territory, Community Solar is an option for those who can't install their own panels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For larger projects, there are often land use issues</li> <li>• Electric cooperatives often have size limits on installations</li> <li>• Only produces energy when it is sunny</li> <li>• In remote areas, interconnection charges and contractor availability can stall projects</li> </ul>
Hydroelectric dams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Produces a large portion of Oregon's renewable energy</li> <li>• Generates power continuously</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large projects are often damaging to ecosystems and against tribal interests</li> <li>• Dams can be expensive to build and maintain</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Micro-hydro/in-conduit hydro</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Energy is generated where it would otherwise be wasted</li> <li>• Can make irrigation of farmland a net positive energy process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Projects often struggle to be profitable</li> <li>• Oregon's water rights system can make for high tensions</li> </ul>
Wind turbines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Huge potential for generation in windy areas</li> <li>• Utility-scale projects increasing in Oregon</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can only work in certain areas</li> <li>• Smaller projects are less viable</li> <li>• Some may complain about viewshed</li> </ul>
Battery electric storage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can help during power outages</li> <li>• Grants are available for many projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be expensive to install</li> <li>• The technology for large-scale storage is still developing</li> </ul>
Biomass	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses wood scraps that would otherwise be burned or tossed.</li> <li>• Can support wildfire mitigation management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is important to manage sustainable fuel sourcing carefully</li> <li>• Financial return is highly dependent on local feedstock supply</li> </ul>
Geothermal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most places in Oregon are suitable for geothermal energy</li> <li>• Consumes very few resources, even compared to solar</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Siting exploration can take lots of time and resources</li> <li>• Large power generation facilities are uncommon and expensive</li> </ul>

## Energy planning in Oregon - what's the story so far?

Energy planning has been around for a long time, and it is becoming a more common practice across the Pacific Northwest. The Northwest Power and Conservation Council has published a [Northwest Power Plan](#) every five years since 1983, with the most recent being in 2021. The city of Portland, Oregon has had a Climate Action Plan since 1993. More recently, in 2021, the Oregon legislature passed [House Bill 2021](#), a law that mandates the decarbonization of Oregon's electric grid by 2040. Large electric utilities are required to submit their own plans about how they will meet this goal. On a smaller scale, counties and cities of all population sizes in Oregon have started to more deliberately plan for their local energy future in recent years. Reading other energy plans and reaching out to the people that helped write them is an excellent way to learn more about how your community's planning process might look. Consult the list of energy planning efforts in Oregon in the Resources section for more information. If your community is interested in developing an energy plan, now is the time to get started!

“

*“I think that the first and most critical decision for a clean energy action plan is the decision to start working on one in the first place. It's even more important than deciding on the scope. In my mind, deciding to start is the hardest decision.”*

- Ray Sanchez Pescador, Solarize Rogue

”

Attendees gathered at one of Sustainable Northwest's Making Energy Work for Rural Oregon events. Photo credit: Sustainable Northwest



# Getting started

## Determining your scope

One of the first and most important decisions to make when building an energy plan is deciding on the scope. The general scope of your plan determines the organization or area the plan applies to as well as what types of data you will need to create it. The main types of scopes for energy plans are:



**Community-wide:** This is an energy plan that encompasses energy use in the whole local community. The community is often defined as a city or a county, but could also be a group of cities or counties, an Indian reservation, or another type of geographical area. This type of plan addresses energy use for everyone who lives in that area, including residential, commercial, industrial, and other users of energy. These plans are often developed by one or more local governments, but can also be developed by local community or non-profit organizations, and often multiple groups collaborate to create a plan. Since this plan affects the whole community, community involvement in creating this type of plan is important. When a community-wide plan is finished, it is usually endorsed or adopted by one or more local governments.



**Government Body:** This is an energy plan created by a city, county, Tribe, or other government body to address the energy use of operations and assets under their control. These operations and assets might include government-owned buildings and vehicles, public waste collection or landfill services, and even public infrastructure like street lights that the government is responsible for managing. Government staff do most of the work of developing this type of plan, and plans are usually approved or adopted by a government body, such as a city council, when they are finished.

*Tip: Government body energy plans can be easy to mix up with community-wide ones because they tend to have similar names, like “City Energy Action Plan,” and both are often created and approved by local governments. To be sure about which type you are looking at, check the scope to see if it is limited to government operations and facilities or includes residential and commercial sectors as well. You can also keep an eye out for words like “community” in the plan’s language, or look at a list of collaborators to see if they come from many different organizations, both of which would suggest a community-wide plan.*

For this report, we will be focusing primarily on community-wide energy plans. Community-wide plans have the largest scope, which makes them useful in finding local energy management strategies that fit the whole community. It also means that a large number of people are involved in the planning process and there is lots of data to collect from multiple sources.

## Assembling a team

Now that you have decided on a scope, it is time to start assembling a team. This is a critical step because the planning team are the people who are responsible for making the energy plan a reality. They will also help decide, along with the rest of the community, what types of energy problems and solutions your plan will focus on most. Who you want on your leadership team will depend on your community, but the goal is to get the whole community involved. Energy affects everyone, so planners should look to engage widely across sectors. And it might be surprising how many people are interested in contributing! To learn more about what it takes to assemble a team for an energy plan, the DOE [Community Energy Strategic Planning guide](#) is a great resource.

### Some ideas for team members are:

- **City and county officials, from multiple municipalities if applicable**
- **Chamber of Commerce and business owners**
- **Local irrigation districts**
- **Local nonprofit organizations**
- **Local economic development districts**
- **Local Energy Trust of Oregon or Oregon DOE representatives**
- **Schools, hospitals, and other large energy consumers**

To recruit people to the energy planning efforts going on in your community, it is a good idea to hold events or meetings at an early stage. Getting the right people in a room together to talk about energy is one of the best ways to move an energy plan forward and start community-based conversations about energy. Susan Badger-Jones told us about how Wallowa Resources coordinated the formation of a leadership team for the Wallowa County Energy Plan: “We convened some key community leaders and stakeholders in the county and asked their thoughts and recommendations for a leadership team, keeping in mind areas of expertise and possible conflicts of interest.” Other types of initial stakeholder events might look like:

An educational presentation about local energy use and energy planning to a local government body or at a community meeting.

A listening meeting with interested or relevant stakeholders to hear their ideas and see if they would want to join a leadership team.

A one-day forum featuring presentations from other communities that have been involved in energy planning.

## Lessons learned

Here is what people involved in energy planning efforts across Oregon have to say about the beginnings of the process.

**Lesson 1: Focus on building capacity.** For more ideas on building capacity for energy planning, check out the Resources section to learn more about the RARE program and Energy Trust of Oregon.

*“You need capacity within the organization, so focus on staff capacity early. Relying on only volunteers makes it difficult to keep a project going. The Energy Trust of Oregon helped pay for consultants, so borrow capacity from them as well.”*

- Les Perkins, Hood River County energy plan contributor

*“Have a champion leading the plan. Surround yourself with people who know what they’re doing, and make sure you have someone who understands politics.”*

- Ray Sanchez-Pescador, City of Talent energy plan contributor

*“There are entities that can provide expertise. You can bring experts together from within or outside the community, you don’t have to be an expert on everything.”*

- Marla Harvey, Hood River County energy plan contributor

**Lesson 2: Get organized.** Have a plan before diving in headfirst!

*“We realized that this is more than just building a timeline. It’s also visualization and familiarizing ourselves with material - finding out that we have to do this before this, adding tasks in. We also built an internal communication plan with the Energy Trust of Oregon.”*

- Joe Basile, Wallowa County energy plan contributor

*“Sustainable Northwest knew we wanted to build community support for an energy plan so they helped us put together a one-day clean energy forum. We made sure all the right people were there. People left energized and on board. Without the forum, it would have taken months to inform and energize supporters.”*

- Becky Brun, Hood River County energy plan contributor

**Lesson 3: Just get started!** The sooner you can start the energy planning process, the better, no need to wait for the perfect time.

*“There’s this idea that you have to get started, it doesn’t have to be perfect, but you have to do something. All the big conversations we’re having in our community are about houselessness, housing affordability, and transportation. An energy plan can help address all those issues, so it’s really a common sense practice to create one.”*

- Lindsey Hardy, Deschutes County energy plan contributor

*“Get started as soon as possible, because things will take longer than you think. Find the right partners and allies. The biggest hurdle is awareness, so having a summary [of the project] on hand would be helpful.”*

- Becky Brun, Hood River County energy plan contributor

*“It was a very grassroots approach. Talent is small and has a small budget, and didn’t have the money to hire an external group to develop a clean energy plan. Instead, we worked with the community to research, write, and develop a clean energy action plan.”*

- Hannah Sohl, City of Talent energy plan contributor



Windmills on rural farmland. Photo credit: Sustainable Northwest

# Engaging the community

In this section, we'll look at the different ways the greater community can be involved in the energy planning process. There was some discussion about where in this report to place the community engagement chapter, since engaging with the public can happen at different stages of planning depending on the planning team's priorities. However, we decided to talk about this topic earlier on in the report, to encourage communities to have stakeholder and public engagement as a foundational part of the planning process. From gathering initial support at the very beginning of planning to advocating for the official adoption of an energy plan once it is complete, community members can be powerful allies in planning.

## Stakeholder engagement

Talking to stakeholders in your community about what they want to see in an energy plan is a great way to gather information about community priorities that can help inform the planning process. But what do we mean by stakeholders? In the context of a community planning effort like an energy plan, "stakeholder" can mean anyone who is involved in or affected by the plan. Since your plan will decide the future energy use of the local area, and everyone needs energy, it is accurate to say that everyone in the community is actually a stakeholder. In this report, we will refer to engaging with organizations and institutions as stakeholder engagement, to distinguish it from general public and community engagement.

### Just a few examples of stakeholders you might want to speak with are:

- Electric and gas utilities, both co-ops and investor-owned
- Local city and county governments
- Local economic development district and/or Council of Governments
- School officials and staff, including colleges and universities
- Transportation authorities
- Nonprofit organizations and community groups, especially those focused on sustainability, transportation, housing, or economic development
- Local economic drivers in your area: these can be lumber mills, ski mountains, hospitals, universities, any industry that employs significant numbers of people locally
- Irrigation districts and farmer's associations
- State government agencies such as ODOE
- Renewable energy developers, especially if your plan includes large-scale development

All these organizations are energy users, and a lot of them also affect how others use energy and transportation. They all have an interest in how the local energy landscape will change in the future, as well as their own goals and priorities. Do local governments, businesses, and transportation services want to switch to electric vehicles? Do schools and landowners want it to be easier to build solar arrays? Are irrigation districts planning to build more hydroelectric generation? Once planners know about ongoing goals and opportunities, they can support them by incorporating them into an energy plan. If talking to stakeholders uncovers barriers, the energy plan can also help reduce those barriers, or at least raise awareness about them.

For example, in Deschutes County, we were able to hold a series of stakeholder meetings early on, inviting different stakeholders to each meeting. We asked stakeholders about where they saw opportunities and challenges in our current system and what their expectations were for the future. At the first meeting, we informed utilities and municipalities about our efforts and asked for their help in collecting data. The second meeting was focused on the intersection of housing and energy, and the third was focused on water and agriculture. This is just one format and set of topics that stakeholder engagement can tackle, but it worked well in Deschutes County because we approached stakeholders to discuss topics that are important in our community and ask them how our future plan can be part of the solution.

## External engagement with tribes

Planning teams should engage with local tribes early in the planning process. Tribal nations are their own sovereign nations, and some tribal governments have their own energy or climate plans and goals. Those that do not yet will still have valuable opinions about land use and energy management. Even if your city or county is not directly adjacent to a reservation, it is important to remember that treaties give tribes access to the ceded land where they have traditionally hunted, fished, and gathered, which includes all of Oregon.



Engaging with stakeholders can go a long way! Photo credit: Sustainable Northwest

## Community engagement

For a community energy plan, community engagement is crucial in order to build a plan that can best serve everyone. Some planning teams that are acting on behalf of a local government might even be legally required to participate in some level of public engagement. But even when it's not a requirement, learning what members of the community want and need from a local energy plan both improves the final plan and ensures a smoother adoption and implementation process.

It is a good idea to focus some of your community engagement efforts specifically on groups that are underrepresented in most planning processes. This may include those who are Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, and people of color (BILAPOC), households experiencing low to moderate income, people living in remote areas, elderly people, and immigrant communities. These groups tend to be disproportionately energy-burdened, which means spending 6% or more of household income on energy expenses. Because of this higher energy burden, any changes that a future energy plan makes will strongly affect these groups, so it's important to consult them as much as possible. Hannah Sohl told us about the Talent Clean Energy Action plan, "I would do even more to embed equity and justice into every aspect of the plan if we did it again. It's important to have a lens on energy burden, especially in rural Oregon."

These voices have historically been underrepresented in public planning processes because they have higher barriers to engagement. One way to combat this is to engage with community based organizations that are led by or provide services for these groups. These organizations may be able to give insight into the general energy needs of underrepresented groups. However, it is important to engage with a wide spectrum of individuals as well, which means lowering barriers to engagement. Those experiencing lower incomes may not have the time or resources to attend public meetings. People of color or those who do not speak English as a primary language may feel uncomfortable speaking up in some settings or attending events where they feel out of place. To encourage participation in community engagement events by these underserved communities, pay special attention to the way events are designed. Below are some questions to consider.

### **Keep in mind when planning an event:**

- **What time is the event being held? Is it a time that most people need to be at work?**
- **Where is the event being held? Who might feel comfortable or uncomfortable in that space? How can you make the space more welcoming?**
- **How is the event's agenda structured? When and how are people expected to speak up and give their opinions?**
- **Can you provide a stipend as compensation for people's time? What about support for childcare or eldercare and transportation?**

In Deschutes County, we noticed that our stakeholder engagement was not reaching the general community, and especially not underserved groups. To add more diversity and perspective to our process, we held a focus group discussion about energy that engaged BILAPOC and those with lower income specifically. We used a professional facilitator, and to decrease barriers to participation, we offered a stipend for participants. The result was that we got to learn from the perspectives of those who do not normally engage with our energy program. We heard from our discussion group that they face financial barriers to using clean energy such as electric or hybrid cars and solar panels, but that they already reduce their energy use at home to keep energy bills low.

Community engagement can be a challenging process, but it can also be rewarding for both planners and community members to build an energy plan together. Since energy planning is not widely understood, planners will have to start by educating the public about how energy is used and produced locally and how energy planning can improve the energy landscape. This can take the form of presentations to existing groups, distributing educational materials, and holding outreach events. Once people understand what planners are trying to do, they can contribute by sharing their experiences with everything from their work commute to their electricity bill. Some will have opinions about ongoing or planned energy projects, plus ideas of their own about what projects they would like to see. Planners can collect public feedback and suggestions by holding open community forums, collecting responses to a survey, or hosting focus group discussions.



Residential rooftop solar is great, but it's out of reach financially for many.  
Photo credit: The Environmental Center

To Marla Harvey, community engagement is crucial to a successful energy plan. She told us that “the bread and butter in rural areas is the relationships. You won’t be able to take advantage of the plan if you can’t convene and educate the community. Having educational material available online and updating it regularly is helpful when going through this process. We had a video on what the energy plan is, plus presentations, information, and articles about specific projects.”

This is not to say that a planning team should let the public dictate every aspect of the plan or that they must incorporate every suggestion. In fact, some suggestions may contradict each other, or even be completely outside of the possible scope for the plan. It is impossible to make everyone happy. However, community outreach can help a planning team understand public sentiment and come to an informed decision.

For a truly collaborative planning process, one option is to create a citizen committee to advise on the final plan. The committee should be representative of the community, with especially strong representation from underserved groups that are less commonly engaged in planning but whose communities are strongly affected by energy policy. The committee can propose goals or projects to the leadership team for inclusion in the plan, advise on the plan’s content and language, and approve or veto the final plan that the planning team comes up with. Michael Hoch collaborated with the citizen group for the Talent Clean Energy Action Plan as part of his position with the City of Talent. “The plan was very citizen-driven,” he said. “Residents interviewed to be on a Citizen Advisory committee that met bimonthly and collaborated with the city council and planning office.” Giving citizens this type of power over an energy plan gives the plan the best possible chance to represent local interests and respond to community needs.



Collaborative conversations with community members are important for getting the most out of the planning process.

Photo credit: Sustainable Northwest

# Forming and finalizing your plan

After doing the hard work of researching options, getting approval and staffing, and assembling a team, it is finally time to create the energy plan. This task usually falls to the leadership team, but it is also a highly collaborative process, usually involving community members, stakeholders, and local governing bodies. There is no wrong way to develop a plan. Whether plan development starts with a curious county employee and is led by government staff, or begins with a group of excited citizens and is spearheaded by a community group, the important thing is that communities are able to come together to combine their ideas into a strategic plan. Even if it is not perfect, just going through the development process and having a plan at the end of it is beneficial for any community.

## Developing an energy inventory

An energy inventory is a collection of information about current energy consumption, expenditures, resources, infrastructure, and often broken down by residential, commercial, or industrial users. It also explores how energy is currently used in a community and, where that energy comes from. An energy inventory is also sometimes called an energy baseline assessment, or energy profile, because one of its other important functions is a baseline to compare future energy progress against. Knowing the energy landscape of your community will inform the entire planning process. The energy inventory can be developed by the planning team simultaneously with the plan, but sometimes it is beneficial to create an inventory before plan development starts. This is especially true if planners want to be able to show plan stakeholders early in the process how deeply energy use already affects their community. Planners can use the inventory to educate stakeholders, elected officials, and the public about energy use and energy sources, as well as the ways a plan can encourage local clean energy initiatives. There is a lot of energy data to be collected from multiple sources before an energy inventory starts to come together. Usually, the inventory includes information on:



**1.** How much energy is consumed locally and which sectors consume it (residential, commercial, industrial, etc)



**2.** How utilities serving the community generate their electricity



**3.** How much renewable energy is produced locally



**4.** A “business as usual” (BAU) scenario showing estimated future energy use and environmental impact

Other common topics for an inventory are greenhouse gas emissions, energy efficiency, energy burden and other economic impacts, heating fuels not distributed by utilities, and more. Each of these topics can be broad or detailed based on the needs, abilities, and priorities of specific communities. Becky Brun, reflecting on Hood River County’s priorities for their plan, said “We were more concerned with what we can actually measure and manage over time. By focusing on energy rather than climate change, there is less a focus on greenhouse gas emissions calculations, and more focus on energy saved and renewable energy generated.”

Having accurate local energy data and being able to communicate that information to others is one of the most useful tools available for moving an energy planning process forward. Hannah Sohl, who was involved with the City of Talent’s energy plan, shared with us that, “the energy profile was really helpful to have and show to people. It was important that we had a renewable energy assessment already done at the county level.”

Creating an energy inventory can seem complicated, but there are new Oregon-specific tools that can help streamline the process. For counties, there’s the Oregon County-Level Energy Action Planner, developed by Eric Strid based on Hood River County’s energy inventory. This spreadsheet planner features multiple BAU scenarios and detailed data entry options. For any community, this best practices report has an accompanying user-friendly energy baseline toolkit that will be available soon. Our toolkit describes the types of data a planning team might need and where to get them, then organizes and builds useful visualizations from that data to help create a final inventory. To learn more about these tools or get inspiration from other energy inventories, visit the Resources section.

Some plan development advice from Les Perkins:

*“Start with getting data and identifying sources. Find out what information to gather and where to get it from. What do you need to know? Once you know where you are, it’s easy to build.”*



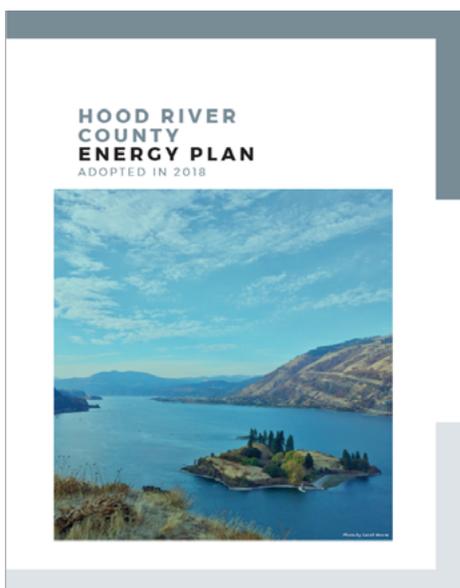
Ground-mounted solar panels. Photo credit: Sustainable Northwest

## Determining goals and actions

The first step when developing the content of any plan is determining the community's goals for their energy plan. This will inform the actions described in the plan. What does the community want to accomplish? Community engagement efforts, like those outlined in the previous chapter, are a great way to find this out. Goals can also be influenced by the priorities of specific stakeholders, like public governing bodies. Planners might consider how energy plan goals will fit within a city's comprehensive plan, for example. Emergency Managers may consider how energy goals align with resilience and hazard mitigation planning.

The next step to goal setting is developing a scope for the goals of your plan. What is feasible within the timeline and geographical area the plan is covering? Having energy data from your energy inventory can help you understand the energy landscape and learn what is possible to accomplish. It is good to aim high, but if future efforts to implement the plan consistently fall short of its goals, or if some goals are ignored altogether, people may be less willing to take it seriously. It's also important to note that not every goal or desired outcome can be included in the plan. A critical piece of this process is editing down, providing focus, and defining what in your scope could be revisited at another time.

There should be concrete, incremental action steps in your plan to go along with each goal and provide a road map to accomplishing them. This is another place where it is important to be realistic. Actions can be ambitious, but they should be feasible. However, not every step needs to be fully fleshed out. Marla Harvey told us, "Having a list of strategies in the plan is important, but not all strategies a community will use are laid out in the plan. Communities will always be learning and iterating strategies based on available opportunities and needs as they work towards the goals."



The Hood River County Energy Plan does this well. For example, one of the plan's three main goals is to "Replace power generated from fossil fuels with clean, renewable energy in buildings, water systems, and transportation by 30% in 2030, 50% in 2040, and 80% in 2050, as compared with 2016 levels." To make goals even more specific and achievable, the plan breaks down four focus areas (Buildings, Transportation and Land Use, Agriculture and Water, and Community Scale Solutions) with objectives for each that align with the main goals, for example, "increase the energy efficiency of new buildings by 50%" is under the Buildings focus area and aligns with with goal quoted above.

Calling on community partners is a good strategy for finding action items. There are likely to be at least some energy related initiatives already in the works with local businesses, community organizations, or municipalities leading the efforts. Incorporating these projects into an energy plan can help support them and will work towards the plan's goals at the same time. It can also help implementation of the plan go more smoothly if multiple organizations can contribute to leading projects. Another good place for inspiration is researching upcoming grants and incentives that can help fund projects. See the Funding Resources section of this report to get started learning about the clean energy grants in Oregon that may be a good fit for your plan's goals.

## Getting your plan adopted

Once a plan has been written and your planning team and stakeholder and community partners are happy with it, it is finally time to get the plan formally adopted by a governing body. Formal recognition and approval of a plan is an important step, as it represents the willingness of governing bodies to support the plan's goals and actions. It can also bring more awareness to the plan's existence because it will be publicly presented at a government meeting.



Community members showing up to a city council meeting in Bend. Having community support can be a critical part of getting a plan adopted. Photo credit: The Environmental Center

To get a plan adopted, a governing body will have to approve it formally. Planners, stakeholders, and partners can appear before the city council, county commission, Tribal council, or other relevant authority and present their case for their energy plan. Ideally, those making these decisions will already know about the energy plan, and may even have been involved in creating it. If you know that some in the room may oppose the energy plan, it can help to encourage community members to show up and voice their support in front of the elected officials. Ultimately, the planning team may have to make revisions to the plan based on feedback they get at this meeting and return with a revised version in the future. Ray Sanchez-Pescador said of this process, "City Council members were important for incorporating the Talent Clean Energy Action plan into the city's comprehensive plan. They were presented with several iterations of the plan before approving it."

There are a few ways a plan can be officially acknowledged by governing bodies. The main difference between these options is how legally binding the plan becomes. Two of our case studies for this report, the City of Talent and Hood River County, are good examples of different ways that plan adoption can go, and their stories show the benefits and drawbacks of making a plan legally binding. The City of Talent energy plan began as a community effort by the organization Rogue Climate. Eventually, with strong community advocacy, they were eventually able to incorporate the energy plan into the city’s comprehensive plan, making it legally binding. Michael Hoch, who helped make this transition, said that “adopting the Clean Energy Action Plan into Talent’s 20 year plan has been good for funding. It gives us an opportunity to connect with the Energy Trust of Oregon, home and building codes, and other current programs.”

On the other hand, the Hood River County energy plan was conceived as a collaboration between multiple entities, including city and county governments. Representatives from different groups worked together to create something they could all agree on. The final plan was adopted in 2018 as a non-binding resolution by Hood River County, the City of Hood River, the Port of Cascade Locks and the Port of Hood River. Les Perkins told us, “There wasn’t much opposition because there were no mandates, though some builders were pushing back on new building codes, especially since the housing cost to income ratio in Hood River County is one of the worst in the state. We worked with the housing authority to include energy projects in low and middle-income housing.” By making the plan non-binding, the Hood River planning team was able to gain the support of multiple municipalities in a more geographically and ideologically diverse area than the City of Talent.



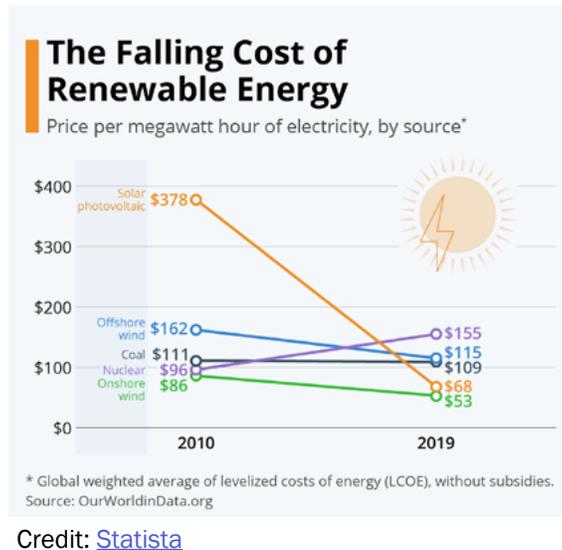
Electric vehicles from a pilot EV car share program in Hood River, which has several locations, including an affordable housing site.

Photo credit: Lindsay McClure / Hood River County Energy Council

## Narrative framing

If you are wondering how you can possibly get people in your rural Oregon community excited about the idea of clean energy and reducing fossil fuels, you are not alone. Oregon is a big state, and political opinions and priorities vary widely. Generally, more rural areas, especially those in the eastern half of the state, are more conservative and tend to prioritize economic resilience. The more densely populated areas, particularly in the western half of the state, are more progressive and more likely to prioritize climate action.

Luckily, you do not need to be an environmentalist to understand the benefits of local clean energy and energy efficiency efforts. There are a wide array of benefits to energy planning that appeal to people on all sides of the political spectrum, including both environmental and economic benefits. In fact, clean energy sources like solar are now among the cheapest energy available, and their price is projected to continue decreasing.



To get people excited about an energy plan, you can use narrative framing by focusing on the benefits that they connect with most. You can do this at a large scale by creating a title and goals for your energy plan that reflect community priorities. Is the plan a Clean Energy Action Plan or an Energy Resilience Plan? Are the plan's goals to cut emissions or to create jobs? It can accomplish both, but the way you frame the story of your plan matters. Framing can affect the support a plan gets from the most important stakeholders. To give you some ideas, below are a few talking points about how clean energy, energy efficiency, and transportation improvements could affect a community.

### Exciting possible outcomes for energy planning

- Supporting local jobs and workforce development in the energy sector
- Reducing a community's carbon footprint
- Increasing energy independence
- Saving families, businesses, and governments money on their power bills
- Increasing tax revenue
- Strengthening the electric grid
- Providing community resilience during emergencies
- Creating a more livable, walkable community

The energy planners we interviewed had a lot to say on the topic of opposition to their plans and framing plans in the best way possible.

*“In Talent, they began with a climate change narrative. This led to a scope with more specific goals about solar ready roofs and electric vehicle charging. However, in eastern Oregon it works better to have goals that are less fine tuned and more broad, such as reducing energy as a whole, or a certain percentage of monetary savings.”*

- Michael Hoch, City of Talent energy plan contributor

*“There were multiple governing bodies with different ideas and priorities: city, county, and more. Working in conservative areas, we needed to tailor our language to get the best results without triggering bad responses. We also focused on keeping money in the community through renewables and even electric vehicle transportation. There are lots of different factors when talking about energy, though all related. It’s important to have a variety of stakeholders and understand what you can impact locally and have local control over to affect the rate of success.”*

- Les Perkins, Hood River County energy plan contributor

*“Part of my job was to see if what the community wanted was actually possible. There was community pushback on specific projects, complaints based on misinformation, people wanting logistically or financially unattainable goals, and lots of armchair experts. We used “nudge economics,” for example, saying that we can include that but it will cost this much.”*

- Michael Hoch, City of Talent energy plan contributor

*“It’s important for everyone to be on the same page about messaging - framing things in a way that appeals to everyone, not just environmentalists.”*

- Ray Sanchez-Pescador, City of Talent energy plan contributor

*“It’s valuable to talk about projects and ideas people can connect to, for example, the risks of fires, winter storms, and resulting power outages.”*

- Marla Harvey, Hood River County Energy Plan Coordinator.

*“One of the things that makes me excited about an energy plan is that it’s not a business or resilience plan, it’s an energy plan, because energy is everything. I like the idea of keeping energy sources local. There’s not one part of society that an energy plan won’t improve. I would challenge someone, what’s the downside of knowing more about your energy use? You can’t make informed decisions without being informed. This is already happening at a federal and state level, let’s prepare communities to do this and be part of the changes.”*

- Bridget Callahan, Deschutes County Energy Plan contributor

# Implementing your plan

So, your plan was adopted! Now the question is, what's next? Implementation is often overlooked in energy planning because so much of the planning team's focus is getting to the milestone of official adoption by a government body. While that is an important step, implementation should not be forgotten, or the plan will sit on a shelf in a government office instead of doing what it was meant to do. Planning teams can prepare for the implementation stage by having a strategy ahead of time. When each goal or action is added to the plan, consider the question of who will be responsible for its implementation. Then, when the plan is approved, the leadership team can meet and strategize with stakeholders and governments about how to make it a reality.

## Assigning responsibilities

It is possible that a government body that worked on the plan will want to take over all the implementation responsibilities, but when the plan is a community energy plan involving many stakeholders and wide-ranging projects, this is unlikely. It is easier for everyone if responsibilities are spread out among different plan partners so that no one organization is overwhelmed. A good starting point is figuring out an organization or group to take basic responsibility of project management and coordination. Marla Harvey elaborated on how the Hood River County Energy Plan solved this problem:

“After the energy plan was adopted, we wanted to find an organization to support coordinated implementation that was respected and had capacity to manage the work. The obvious choice was the community's economic development district, Mid-Columbia Economic Development District (MCEDD). With the support of outside funding, MCEDD convenes partners, helped coordinate work plan development, and supported implementation of identified priorities. The priorities were set by the newly formed Hood River County Energy Council, which is an advisory council made up of representatives from adopting Energy Plan bodies and other community volunteers with expertise or interest in an area of the plan. It was created after adoption of the plan as a continuation of the steering committee. The council supports implementation through relationships, expertise, and coordination. It doesn't have legal authority.”



Solar panels on Hood River Middle School.  
Photo credit: Lindsay McClure and Hood River County Energy Council

Les Perkins has also noticed the benefits of collaborative implementation. “There’s a combination of entities doing implementation - MCEDD, Hood River County, and people championing specific projects. This is good because the onus is not on one entity, but it’s difficult to coordinate, especially because all are volunteers.”

Meanwhile in Talent, the Alameda Fire in the fall of 2020 decimated the city’s capacity to implement their newly passed energy plan. Since the plan was incorporated into the city’s comprehensive plan, coordinating implementation was mostly left to the city. According to Michael Hoch, who worked as Talent’s Sustainability and Code Enforcement Officer, “Implementation is Council-driven. The City Council can direct city staff to work on certain goals. My position with the City worked on implementation, and there is also a directive in the Clean Energy Action plan to have a full-time energy position at the City.”

That is not to say that the greater community in Talent does not play a part in implementation. Ray Sanchez-Pescador told us about the role that Solarize Rogue played in implementation: “Solarize Rogue was created to help the city implement the plan. We started by promoting rooftop solar and talking to community members about solar. We learned that people often had unsuitable roofs for solar or were renters, so we started a community solar project to solve that problem. It opened the door to something we already wanted to do.”



A Solarize Rouge solar array on the roof of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival’s production building in Talent. It includes both a community solar project and a project for OSF.  
Photo credit: Solarize Rogue and True South Solar

## Initial projects

Once the structure is in place for project management responsibilities, the work of getting projects done begins. There might be a natural choice for the first project to work on, especially if a project that was already in motion made its way into the plan. Any project that is simple and easy to achieve is a good candidate, especially if it aligns closely with the plan's goals. Projects that are popular among the planning team or in the community are also a good place to start because people will be excited to work on them. Marla Harvey had this to say about how the Hood River County Energy Council chose which projects to pursue first:

*“We started with quick wins and opportunities, stuff that was already happening. We asked ourselves, what does this affect? Equity? Governments? How much community benefit does it bring? How does it fit our goals?”*

The first few completed projects, especially if they are highly visible, are a great way to get more people excited about energy in their community. Keeping the public up to date on new projects through educational resources, news articles, and more will build support for future projects, too. Below are some examples of initial or ongoing projects in Hood River County and the City of Talent.



Michael Hoch stands next to an EV charging station installed as part of the City of Talent's energy plan goals. Photo credit: City of Talent

### Examples of initial projects

- **EV charging infrastructure was identified as an early priority for both places, and both have since installed several charging stations.**
- **Solar installations, particularly in Talent through Solarize Rogue, which developed an ownership-model community solar project.**
- **In Talent, energy savings through demand response, where utilities incentivize customers to use less energy at peak times.**
- **In Hood River, an EV car-share project, in partnership with Forth**
- **In Hood River, starting to work on resilient microgrid projects involving solar and batteries.**

## Keeping momentum and building capacity

Good project management and collaboration between organizations that are responsible for implementing an energy plan will allow the plan to be successful. Intentional and organized implementation is important for accomplishing any long term goals established in the plan. It also helps keep the plan a priority for all those who agreed to it. In addition, getting started with projects that are low-hanging fruit can help give the implementation team a sense of accomplishment while also showing the community the benefits of planning for their energy future.

It is not always easy to keep momentum for your plan, especially if you face volunteer burnout from those who worked on the plan, low capacity for project management, and staff turnover within key organizations. The organization responsible for implementation might want to consider making room in their budget for a new position or build other additional capacity so that more time can be dedicated to the plan. For a look at capacity building resources, see the Resources section of this report. Until then, sharing the responsibilities of implementation between governmental bodies and community groups can help make sure that the plan is progressing. Ultimately, a community energy plan always comes back to the community. If community members understand and care about the goals and actions in your plan, there is a much higher chance that the plan will be successful.



Solar panels on the Hood River Valley Aquatic Center, which were installed long before the energy plan. Legacy projects like this can provide great insight into community priorities. Photo credit: Lindsay McClure and Hood River Energy Council

# Resources

This section will outline resources for learning about clean energy, Oregon’s energy landscape, energy planning guidelines, and funding and supporting the energy planning process.

## Capacity building and planning process resources

These resources can help you get started with energy plan development and expand your capacity by adding team members and partnerships.

- [Energy Trust of Oregon assistance for communities](#). The Energy Trust operates within the territory of Oregon’s investor owned utilities, Pacific Power, Portland General Electric, Cascade Natural Gas, and Avista and may provide planning and financial assistance or technical resources for energy planning.
- [Resource Assistance for Rural Environments](#) (RARE), University of Oregon’s AmeriCorps program. Several Oregon communities, including locations such as the City of Talent, Hood River County, and Deschutes County, have had RARE AmeriCorps members play a crucial role in plan development.
- Your local nonprofits and community groups, especially those which emphasize energy, transportation, or the environment in their mission

## Funding and support resources

Funding and support resources are programs or entities that have funds or supportive programs available for clean energy or energy efficiency projects large and small. Some of these are useful for plan development, or researching what kinds of projects attract funding. However, they will be most useful when implementing the projects in your plan.

- Energy Trust of Oregon incentives: incentives for most types of projects as long as they are in investor-owned utility territory (Pacific Power and Portland General Electric)
  - [Commercial existing buildings](#)
  - [Commercial new buildings](#)
  - [Industrial equipment](#)
  - [Irrigation improvements](#)
  - [Residential](#)
  - [Solar energy](#)

## Funding and support resources (continued)

- Oregon Department of Energy (ODOE)
  - [1.5% Green Energy Technology \(GET\) program](#)
  - [Community Renewable Energy Program \(CREP\) grants](#)
  - [Incentives](#)
  - [Solar and storage rebate program](#)
  - [State Energy Efficient Design \(SEED\) program](#)
  - [Home energy scoring](#)
  - [Energy Efficient Schools program](#)
  - And many more! Ask a local ODOE representative for programs that might fit your plan.
- [USDA energy grants](#)
  - [Renewable Energy Development Assistance \(REDA\) grants](#) for technical assistance, energy audits, and site assessments
  - [Rural Energy for America Program \(REAP\) Energy Systems & Energy Efficiency Improvement Guaranteed Loans & Grants](#)
- Utility grant programs
  - Check your local cooperative or municipal utilities for community grant funds and rebates
  - [Pacific Power's Blue Sky grant program](#)
  - [Portland General Electric's renewable development fund](#)
- [Office of Indian Energy Policy and Programs](#)
  - [Current funding opportunities page](#)
  - [Technical assistance](#)
- [US DOE Communities Local Energy Action Program \(LEAP\)](#) for low-income, energy-burdened communities experiencing direct environmental justice impacts or direct economic impacts from a shift away from fossil fuels

## Informational resources

These resources can help you with writing your energy plan, organizing your planning process, understanding different types of energy plans, and learning about Oregon's energy landscape.

### Energy planning guides

- Rocky Mountain Institute's [Community Energy Resource Guide](#)
- US Department of Energy's [Guide to Community Energy Strategic Planning](#)
- US DOE Office of Indian Energy's [Tribal Strategic Energy Plan and Planning Handbook](#), useful for tribes or those working closely with them

### Energy plan and baseline inventory examples

- [Ashland Climate and Energy Action Plan](#)
- [City of Bend Community Climate Action Plan](#)
- [City of Silverton Energy Plan](#)
- City of Talent Clean Energy Action Plan
  - [Original version 2017-2018](#)
  - Incorporated into Talent Comprehensive Plan as [Clean Energy Element J](#)
- [Hood River County Energy Plan](#)
- [Lane County Climate Action Plan](#)
  - [Lane County Greenhouse Gas Inventory](#)
- [Local Energy Planning in Practice report](#) by the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy (ACEEE)
- [Rogue Valley Renewable Energy Assessment](#)

### Oregon-based resources

- [Bonneville Environmental Foundation \(BEF\)](#), non-profit arm of BPA
- [Bonneville Power Administration \(BPA\)](#), power supplier for most small OR utilities
- [Climate Friendly and Equitable Communities rules](#)
- [Energy Trust of Oregon](#)
- [Farmers' Conservation Alliance](#)
- [Northwest Power Plan](#)
- [Oregon Community Solar Program](#)
- Oregon County Level Energy Action Planner (OCLEAP) spreadsheet tool

## Informational resources (continued)

### Oregon-based resources (continued)

- [Oregon Department of Energy](#)
  - [Biennial Energy Report](#)
  - [Electric Vehicle Dashboard](#)
  - [Find Your Utility page](#)
  - [Policy briefs](#): including a list of communities involved in energy planning on page 13
  - [Oregon Guidebook for Local Energy Resilience](#), especially useful for those working closely with COUs
  - [Oregon Renewable Energy Siting Assessment \(ORESAs\) tool](#)
  - [Solar Dashboard](#)
- [Oregon Department of Transportation \(ODOT\)](#)
- [Oregon Energy Policy Simulator](#)
- [Oregon Global Warming Commission Roadmap to 2035](#)
- [Oregon House Bill 2021](#), plus other legislation important to energy
- Your local county and city websites!

### Tools and services for greenhouse gas (GHG) inventories and energy plans

- [Clean air cool planet](#): Free campus-level carbon calculator
- [Center for Climate Strategies](#): provides broad support for climate related planning
- [Good Company](#): provides GHG inventory services
- [ICF's Integrated Planning Model](#) for detailed analysis of power systems
- [International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives \(ICLEI\)](#): local governments, regional authorities, tribal nations, and educational institutions can become members and get help working towards sustainability goals
  - [Clear Path](#): inventory, forecasting, planning, and monitoring tool available to ICLEI members
- [MOVES](#): mobile source emissions model for calculating emissions from vehicles
- [National Renewable Energy Lab's State and Local Planning for Energy \(SLOPE\) Platform](#)
- [US DOE's Alternative Fuels Data Center](#)

## Informational resources (continued)

### Electric cooperative membership and energy justice

- [Energy Democracy, Y'all](#): great informational resource about what your type of utility means for your control over your energy supply
- [Initiative for Energy Justice](#): supports frontline communities fighting for a just energy transition
- [Institute for Local Self Reliance Energy Democracy Initiative](#): provides state scorecards on community power, and tools for local action
- [Rural Electric Cooperative Toolkit](#) for increasing the power of cooperative members
- [Rural Power Electric Co-op campaign](#) to support rural communities and the energy transition

### Other informational resources:

- [Database of State Incentives for Renewables and Efficiency \(DSIRE\)](#) to find other incentives and policies
- [US EIA energy consumption and efficiency data by sector](#)
- [Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\) energy resources page](#)
- [RMI's Reinventing Fire analysis](#) on reducing fossil fuels while growing the economy

### Community engagement

- [Arnstein's Ladder of Participation](#) framework to understand citizen power
- [Strategic Doing](#) workshop method for collaborating with community
- [RMI article](#) on fostering community engagement for utilities
- [Energy Trust of Oregon report](#) on community engagement