

Exploratory Workshop on Defining Community for Climate Resilience and Energy Transition

Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies

Salata Institute for Climate and Sustainability Research Cluster on Strengthening Communities,

Harvard University

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NB: The workshop will follow Chatham House rules.

Purpose:

Recent federal legislation on climate change and energy transition prioritizes “community,” but Congress did not establish a uniform definition or implementation priorities for the federal agencies responsible for implementation, and state and local governments are also confronting uncertainties in using these central concepts. Meanwhile, community members themselves, demographers, public health scholars, city planners, and social scientists have established various approaches to conceptualizing and measuring community and social equity. This workshop will convene policy experts and decision makers, researchers, and community-based advocates to identify areas where agencies’ definitions of community may not fit community members’ own self-definitions, may benefit from new conceptual and methodological developments, or may guide new research.

Agenda:

We aim to have each session include 2-3 policy, community-organizing, and academic experts addressing:

- How specific communities are experiencing impacts related to climate change and/or the energy transition
- Relevant legal frameworks defining “community” for purposes of key federal programs
- Open questions for federal or state officials implementing these programs
- Existing sociological/demographic research and open questions on defining “communities”

Welcome and Opening Remarks

9:00-9:30

Session 1: Laying the Groundwork

9:30-11:00

This session will provide essential background on key federal definitions of “community”, including “disadvantaged communities” and “energy communities” under the Inflation Reduction Act and Justice40 Initiative. We will discuss how these definitions are being used to distribute federal resources, and the opportunities and limitations of these definitions in the context of community members’ lived experiences and academic research.

Questions:

- Who is included and excluded from these definitions, what tools exist to identify those communities, and how might federal or state agencies use those tools in the context of implementing federal programs?

- How do these definitions interact with Tribal communities, including federally-recognized Tribes, state-recognized Tribes, and unrecognized Tribes?

Session 2: Tracing Resources from the Federal to Community Level

11:15-12:45

In this session, we will trace how federal resources make their way to state governments, local governments, and community organizations. We will focus on federal funding designed to directly or indirectly benefit “communities” and if that funding is actually reaching those communities. This discussion will include a focus on funds distributed directly to community organizations, as well as funds distributed to state, Tribal, or territorial governments, local governments, or other private entities, and what measures those entities are taking to ensure transparency, accountability, and meaningful community engagement.

Questions:

- How do communities define their needs for climate resilience and energy transition? Through what social processes and political mechanisms?
- How are Community Benefit Agreements used to distribute resources from energy transition projects?

Lunch (provided)

12:45-1:45

Moderated discussion

Session 3: Engaging “Community”

2:00-3:30

Many federal grant programs require state and local governments to “meaningfully engage” communities. This session will explore how impacted communities and academia can inform who and how governments engage in these processes, and model best practices. We will also discuss the real capacity limitations of local governments and community-based organizations in particular to engage in these processes, and opportunities for academia to support that capacity.

Questions:

- What does “community engagement” look like from a “community” perspective? What do communities want?
- What does research tell us about the impacts of different community engagement processes?
- What resources are needed for better community engagement?

Session 4: Moving Forward

3:45-5:15

In this session we will synthesize key takeaways and identify next steps for both public actors and academia. Our goal is to identify key research questions, research tools, capacities, or policy

priorities to support a holistic and representative understanding of “community” in the implementation of federal programs.

Questions:

- How can academia better support impacted communities to ensure they are fully represented and able to meaningfully participate in and access public programs?
- How can academia better support governments seeking to meaningfully engage and direct resources towards impacted communities?