



Community Benefits Plans (CBP) in Energy Infrastructure Siting

Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA)
Office of Environmental Justice and Equity (OEJE)

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The Office of Environmental Justice and Equity

- The **Massachusetts Office of Environmental Justice and Equity (OEJE)** is responsible for implementing environmental justice principles, as defined in section 62 of chapter 30, in the operation of each office and agency under the executive office. Environmental justice principles are:
 1. Meaningfully involve all people with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies, including climate change policies; and
 2. Equitably distribute energy and environmental benefits and burdens.
- The **2024 Climate Act** enshrined OEJE into statute, with a specific mandate to develop standards and guidelines governing the potential use and applicability of community benefits plans and agreements, and cumulative impact analyses.



Key Terms to Know

- ✓ **Environmental Justice (EJ):** Environmental justice is the equal protection and meaningful involvement of all people and communities with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of energy, climate change, and environmental laws, regulations, and policies and the equitable distribution of energy and environmental benefits and burdens.
- ✓ **Disadvantaged Community(-ies):** A community or communities experiencing disproportionate environmental, climate, public health, and economic burdens.
- ✓ **Meaningful Engagement:** Early, continuous, accessible, and culturally competent public involvement that allows for community input to inform decision-making and public policy.
- ✓ **Just Transition:** Economic and social shift to clean energy that centers equity, environmental justice, workers and frontline communities.



What is a Community Benefits Plan?

A Community Benefits Plan outlines **commitments** by project developers to provide meaningful, measurable benefits to communities—especially those who are historically disadvantaged, overburdened, and underserved.

Community benefits are the **tangible and lasting outcomes** that a project delivers in response to the priorities, needs, and concerns of the communities it impacts.



CBP vs. CBA

| Community Benefits Plan (CBP) | Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Non-legally enforceable plan created by a project developer, in consultation with the affected community• Summary of community engagement• Outline a developer's commitment to the community's needs (e.g., affordable housing, job creation, increased access to green spaces, etc.)• Begin development during the Energy Facilities Siting Board (EFSB) or municipal consolidated permit pre-filing process | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Legally binding agreements negotiated between municipalities or community organizations and developers• Outline specific benefits that the developer will provide to the community• Enforceable in court, which gives communities a stronger guarantee that the developer will follow through on their commitments• A CBA can be an outcome of a CBP |



Why CBPs Matter

- Historically, disadvantaged communities have borne the brunt of fossil fuel energy infrastructure and related pollution while lacking access to the benefits.
- **CBPs reframe development of clean energy projects to:**
 1. Center community voices
 2. Reduce harm and displacement
 3. Build local wealth and capacity
 4. Reduce legal, political, and community risk for developers



Community Engagement Process – Core Principles

- ✓ **Begin Early:** Communities should be engaged early in the project development process — before decisions are finalized—to shape meaningful outcomes.
- ✓ **Ensure Inclusion:** Impacted disadvantaged communities and those historically marginalized should be prioritized. Participation should be accessible and equitable.
- ✓ **Build Trust Through Transparency:** Open, honest communication about project goals, risks, benefits, and limitations fosters trust and credibility between communities and project proponents.
- ✓ **Respect Cultural Relevance:** Engagement efforts should reflect and respect the community's language, values, history, and communication styles to be meaningful and accessible.
- ✓ **Make Engagement Ongoing:** Engagement is not a checkbox—it's a continuous, iterative, two-way dialogue throughout the project development, siting and permitting.
- ✓ **Embed Accountability:** Create mechanisms to track progress, honor commitments, and empower community oversight.



Step-by-Step: How to Develop a Strong CBP

While every community is different and may require different needs, this structure ensures a consistent approach to transparency, inclusion, and accountability. Each step is intended to be flexible enough to adapt to local context, while rigorous enough to ensure the process leads to real, measurable community benefits.

- 1 Stakeholder Mapping and Community Identification**
- 2 Develop a Community Engagement Plan**
- 3 Conduct Pre-Filing Community Outreach**
- 4 Co-Create Benefit Commitments**
- 5 Develop a Written, Public CBP**
- 6 Formalize Accountability**



Turning Commitments into Action

A well-structured CBP should:

- Clearly describe each proposed benefit, including what is being delivered and who it is intended to serve.
- Provide a clear timeline for delivery, aligned with project phases (i.e., pre-construction, construction, operations).
- Identify responsible parties for implementation.
- Outline the funding sources and budget for each benefit, providing transparency into how resources are allocated and sustained.
- Include **SMARTIE** milestones for each commitment, ensuring that goals are:
Specific // Measurable // Achievable // Relevant // Time-Bound // Inclusive // Equitable



Components of the CBP

1. **Executive Summary:** A concise overview of the project, the engagement process, key benefit outcomes, and intended outcomes.
2. **Project Description and Context:** A summary of the proposed energy infrastructure, including need for the project, location, size, type of technology, timeline, and potential impacts.
3. **Community Engagement Summary:** A description of the outreach and engagement process used to develop the CBP. Include: methods of outreach, meeting dates and locations, participation metrics, key themes from community input, and how feedback informed benefit commitments. Identify all community-based partners or advisory bodies involved in the process.
4. **Identified Community Priorities:** A summary of the needs, concerns, and priorities expressed by community members and stakeholders.



Components of the CBP (cont.)

5. **Benefit Commitments:** Detailed list of SMARTIE commitments
6. **Monitoring and Accountability Framework:** A description of how progress will be tracked, reported, and evaluated over time, including modifications made in response to community feedback.
7. **Sustainability and Long-Term Impact:** A description of how benefits will be sustained beyond the construction phase.
8. **Appendices (if applicable):** Supporting documents such as letters of support, community engagement materials, survey results, or partnership agreements.



Examples of Effective & Meaningful Commitments

These examples reflect common priorities such as environmental justice, economic development, infrastructure, sustainability, and environmental protections. Commitments made will depend on the type and size of the project, the impacts on the community and be adapted to the context of each community’s goals and challenges.

| Environmental Justice and Equity | Economic Development and Workforce |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A local hiring plan with clearly defined goals for participation from EJ Populations.• Funds for the installation of air quality monitors and a community-led environmental health monitoring program.• A Community Advisory Council, including labor, Tribal, and environmental justice representatives. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Project Labor Agreements (PLAs)• Workforce development investments, including critical supportive services.• Training and apprenticeship programs.• Investments in affordable housing. |



Examples of Effective & Meaningful Commitments (cont.)

Infrastructure and Community Support

- Investment in transportation and access improvements (e.g., bus lanes and bus shelters, public transit infrastructure, road upgrades, public access routes).
- Co-development with the community of community infrastructure (e.g., broadband expansion, community-owned microgrids, public EV charging, shared EVs).
- Investment in public open and green spaces.
- Investment in community centers and parks, local community organizations, mental health and substance abuse services, etc.

Environmental and Public Health Protections

- Support for long-term energy efficiency programs, such as retrofitting buildings to meet higher energy performance standards, installing solar panels, or supporting community-based renewable energy cooperatives.
- Integration of wildlife and habitat protection into the development plan, such as creating wildlife corridors, preserving wetlands, or planting native vegetation to restore natural ecosystems.
- Systems for monitoring environmental impacts, including air, water, and soil quality.
- Designation of an environmental compliance officer for the project.



Oversight & Accountability

- A CBP is only as strong as the systems in place to monitor and evaluate its implementation. To maintain public trust and ensure follow-through, CBP plans should include commitments to regular, transparent reporting and open communication with the community.
- Proponents should establish clear accountability mechanisms that may include:
 - a monitoring and reporting schedule, aligned with project milestones
 - designated point(s) of contact for community members and regulatory bodies
 - public-facing progress reports, published at least quarterly and made available in multiple languages and accessible formats; or
 - opportunities for community to review progress—through advisory committees, listening sessions, or other forums
- **Proponents are encouraged to take the next step by entering into Community Benefit Agreements (CBAs) with community-based organizations, municipalities, or coalitions that reflect the interests and needs of impacted residents.** These agreements can help solidify expectations, clarify roles, and provide a legal or contractual framework for follow-through.



For Public Comment

- What role should the EFSB play in this process?
- What are other categories or specific examples of community benefits that clean energy developers and utilities can offer?
- Projects are required to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts. CBPs are one tool to illustrate and memorialize those commitments. What are other tools?
- What are some barriers for clean energy developers to actualizing CBPs/CBAs?
- In most cases, CBAs will add to the overall cost of the project, which is then passed on to ratepayers. Given this factor, is there concern about the impact CBAs could have on communities?