BUILDUS

From Policy to Possibility

Strategies and Case Studies for Building Ecosystems That Deliver Community Benefits and Build Community Power

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Introduction

This report aims to answer the question, "What capacities allow communities to convert ambitious public policy into lasting opportunity and systems change?"

Background

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (BIL), the CHIPS and Science Act (CHIPS), and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) represented one of the largest public investments in generations. Together, these laws unlocked trillions of dollars in investment for infrastructure, domestic manufacturing, and clean energy. These dollars represented an opportunity not only to decarbonize and increase the United States' competitiveness globally, but also, critically, to revitalize communities and produce high-quality and family-sustaining jobs. Just as important as the funding levels authorized, the laws contained mechanisms that created new expectations for how public investment should be implemented: measures to support good jobs, secure community benefits, expand public engagement, and ensure resources directly reach historically disinvested communities.

BuildUS was founded in 2023, bringing together clean energy, worker power, economic justice, and communications funders who saw an opportunity in the laws to advance structural economic change while delivering tangible benefits to workers and multiracial working-class communities. These funders recognized that realizing the full transformative potential of the laws depended on whether states, local governments, Tribes, community organizations, and others had the capacity to translate them into meaningful community outcomes.

> *"The City of Madison had a $20M Community Change grant, with $10M going to affordable housing and residents. Despite this money being currently inaccessible, we're continuing to do the work needed to upgrade affordable housing. Even if we cannot currently do 700 units a year, we are completing upgrades on approximately 100 units a year."*
>
> **Abigail Corso, Elevate**

The federal context changed significantly over the course of three years. Beginning in 2025, many programs were delayed, reduced, or discontinued, and the expectations for equitable implementation embedded in the laws were largely abandoned. Yet the work already underway did not disappear. Today, communities are continuing to advance projects and programs with and without federal dollars, while organizations, governments, and their partners are building new expertise, relationships, leadership, and ways of working together. While many individual funding opportunities have changed, continued investment in these capacities and relationships is critical to ensuring that efforts already underway deliver meaningful and equitable outcomes, and that the civic infrastructure built through implementation endures. With sustained support, this infrastructure can help communities realize the benefits of the $193B[1] still being deployed, strengthen their ability to shape the regular flow of public investment into their communities, and mobilize quickly when the next major policy opportunity arises.

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[1] Investing in America Funding Tracker, National Funding Summary, accessed on August 31, 2026. $193B includes a subset of grant awards that has not yet been deployed. It excludes new grants that are still being awarded and tax credit investments that are also central parts of these laws.

BuildUS Role & Experience

BuildUS's strategy evolved as implementation unfolded and the federal context changed. The fund began by investing broadly across places and capacities, including place-based coalition building and worker organizing tied to implementation opportunities, communications, and field-building around federal grants and the laws' new mechanisms. Over time, BuildUS narrowed geographically and shifted toward projects with a clearer path to implementation, while strengthening economic communications networks in those same geographies. In its final phase, BuildUS invested in key implementation organizations and capacities that will continue serving the field beyond the fund's sunset.

The strategies highlighted in each chapter of this report reflect lessons about each capacity from BuildUS's experience. In addition, several broader lessons emerged that are relevant to how the strategies can be supported and sustained over time. First, implementation requires both flexible and sustained investment. Much of the work was new, requiring organizations and agencies to learn new funding and tax mechanisms, build unfamiliar partnerships, and adapt to changing federal guidance and political conditions. Flexible resources created room to learn and adapt, while sustained investment helped preserve the trusted relationships, institutional knowledge, and coordinating capacity that take years to build and allow communities to continue producing results and remain ready to act when new big policy moments arrive.

BuildUS also learned that implementation is hard, complex work that moves faster when the right capacities are integrated rather than fragmented. Organizations that were purpose-built for this implementation moment brought together technical assistance, project development, financing, policy, communications, and organizing support to help communities navigate complex projects and keep them moving. Concentrating support in priority geographies reinforced these efforts by giving local organizations, governments, funders, and technical partners more opportunities to build working relationships, identify gaps, and solve problems together. National partners could then strengthen locally rooted implementation ecosystems with specialized expertise, flexible resources, and learning across places.

Together, these experiences point toward investing not simply in individual projects or organizations, but in the durable infrastructure that enables communities to move opportunities from policy to implementation. In BuildUS's view, this implementation infrastructure is also civic infrastructure. By helping communities shape public investment and experience government delivering tangible benefits, it can strengthen local institutions, public trust, and ultimately our democracy.

Goals of the Report

In this report, we seek to answer the question, **"What capacities allow communities to convert ambitious public policy into lasting opportunity and systems change?"** Our answer is that successful implementation depends on an ecosystem of complementary capacities: organizing, advocacy, government partnerships, technical expertise, financing, communications, research, workforce development, and ecosystem coordination. Implementation of BIL, CHIPS, and IRA is fundamentally a collaborative, place-based endeavor in which these capacities reinforce one another. When these capacities are connected, communities are able to turn public investment into lasting economic opportunity, while also strengthening local leadership and institutional capacity to drive broader change.

We hope the report serves as a practical resource for philanthropy, state and local governments, and practitioners to identify the capacities and strategies needed to deliver community-driven, community-benefiting projects that also build power. While each section focuses on a distinct implementation capacity, the examples show that these capacities are most effective when they work together. Advocacy that embeds standards in new projects can lead to demand for good union jobs, which can in turn build a base of support to defend these projects if they are under threat. Well-built organizing infrastructure can help mobilize communities around new funding opportunities, and when the capital comes together to deploy these projects, they can be translated into wins to organize more community members. We encourage readers who primarily operate in one area of this ecosystem to explore other sections to better understand the connection points that lead to stronger outcomes for working people and communities.

The ecosystem assessment framework at the end of the report provides a way to apply this perspective to a town, region, or state across a wide range of current and future public investments or policies that communities may want to prepare for or implement. Intended as a guidepost rather than a scorecard, it can help readers identify existing strengths, missing or underdeveloped capacities, and priorities for investment. The strongest ecosystems are those that not only deliver successful projects and programs, but also build lasting community capacity and power.

Finally, the report reflects the areas where BuildUS and its partners focused their efforts. As a result, it places greater emphasis on organizational and institutional strength, capital deployment, workforce development, ecosystem coordination, and market-shaping; gives less attention to research; and does not address regulatory enforcement. Examples are drawn primarily from clean energy, with additional examples from manufacturing and infrastructure.



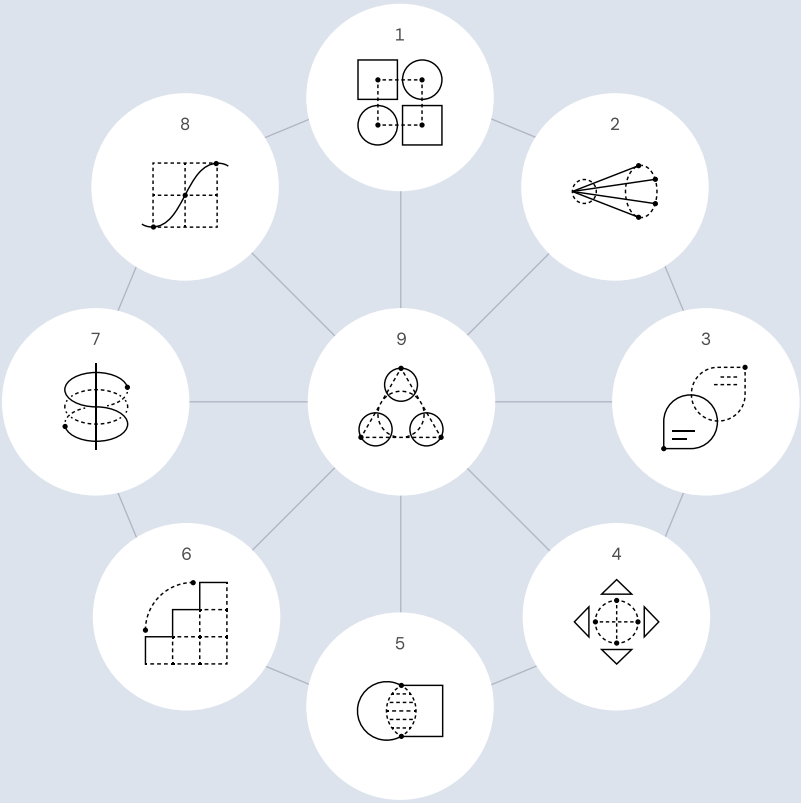
Continued investment is critical to ensuring that efforts underway finish strong, and that the relationships, systems, and expertise built through implementation endure.

Photo by Matthew Kaplan,
courtesy of Chicago Teachers Union

Ecosystem Capacities

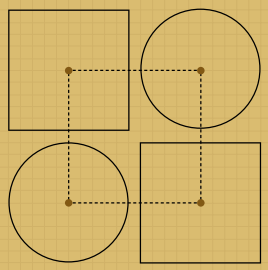
Implementation is fundamentally a collaborative, place-based endeavor in which an ecosystem of capacities mutually reinforce one another. We encourage readers who primarily operate in one area of this ecosystem to explore other sections to better understand the connection points that lead to stronger outcomes for working people and communities.

1. Organizing Infrastructure and Community Engagement
2. Advocacy
3. Communications
4. Technical Assistance, Navigation, and Project Development
5. Government-Community Partnerships
6. Workforce Development
7. Capital and Financing
8. Research and Data Tracking
9. Ecosystem Builders



Pillar 1

Organizing Infrastructure and Community Engagement



Introduction

Organizing builds the collective power of residents and workers to act on the issues that matter to them and shape the decisions that affect their communities and workplaces. It depends on organized constituencies, trusted relationships, local leadership, and coalitions that bring diverse groups together around shared goals. This infrastructure enables workers and communities to exercise greater agency over their economic futures, while engaging new people in civic life and building durable power that can extend beyond any single campaign or project.

BIL, CHIPS, and IRA demonstrated how major public investments can create new opportunities to exercise and expand that power. They included provisions designed to help federal investments translate into good jobs and community benefits, creating new points of leverage that propelled worker organizing already underway and galvanized organizing around new investments. At the same time, implementation created concrete, place-based opportunities to shape projects and public decisions, broaden constituencies, develop new leaders, strengthen coalitions, and secure tangible benefits. Through organizing around implementation, communities have strengthened their power to shape current and future policy and public investment decisions. Where public investments lack similar provisions, organizers have fewer built-in points of leverage for securing worker and community benefits, making sustained organizing infrastructure even more important for continued progress.

Strategies

A. Invest in base-building well before it is needed

Successful organizing infrastructure in communities and in workplaces is built over years of sustained engagement around shared priorities. When new programs, investments, and campaigns arise, an existing strong base is what allows groups to inform impacted constituents effectively and mobilize them quickly if needed. It is also what puts communities and workers in a position to shape the design of projects, the terms of outside investment, and the quality of the jobs that come with them.

B. Build labor–community partnerships with joint strategy and coordination

Community and labor groups can be mutually beneficial partners to drive better community and worker outcomes. However, real partnership means engaging as long-term co-developers of strategy and exercising power together, rather than one party being called upon primarily when the other needs mobilization support. When these groups are coordinated with shared strategy and mutual accountability, they are more likely to win and expand power over time, especially considering the multi-year, and often non-linear, nature of campaigns.

C. Provide dedicated funding for both coalition leadership and participation

Coalitions are often stronger when one organization or staff member is responsible for leading, including holding the campaign manager role, convening partners, and keeping strategy moving. That role can also include building and managing shared infrastructure such as digital organizing tools and data systems. Dedicated funding for all coalition members can support more consistent engagement and trust-based relationships that make it easier to establish clear roles, accountability structures, and shared priorities—and ultimately, more resilient coalitions.

D. Support coalitions with the resources needed to win binding commitments

Binding commitments in contracts, collective bargaining agreements, or community benefits agreements help ensure projects and investments result in real gains for communities and workers. Winning them requires deep relationships to accurately represent communities, the organizing strength to mobilize members, and the campaign and legal expertise to know where and how commitments can be made to stick. Intentionally connecting coalitions to national and regional experts can help build that expertise locally.

E. Support diversified, flexible coalition strategies that can be resilient when conditions change

Corporate targets can fold and funding applications can be denied. Coalitions organized around a single project or sector can lose members when that specific opportunity does not materialize, while a broader frame, such as economic development, can keep more partners at the table through changing conditions. This lets a coalition keep building and exercising the campaign muscle to develop successful strategies and engage on new opportunities as they arise.

F. Use implementation as an organizing and leadership development opportunity

Public investment implementation should both deliver projects and expand the number of people who participate in shaping the future of their communities. Outreach, project planning, advisory bodies, public meetings, benefit campaigns, and implementation oversight all provide opportunities to recruit new leaders, deepen community relationships, and build durable organizations that outlast individual investments.

Examples

Strategy key: **A.** Invest in base-building well before it is needed; **B.** Build labor–community partnerships with joint strategy and co-ordination; **C.** Provide dedicated funding for both coalition leadership and participation; **D.** Support coalitions with the resources needed to win binding commitments; **E.** Support diversified, flexible coalition strategies that can be resilient when conditions change; **F.** Use implementation as an organizing and leadership development opportunity

Building Upon a Decade of Tenant Organizing for Neighborhood Decarbonization

Strategies

A F

Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE) has been organizing tenants in Richmond, California since 2010 around housing conditions—including mold, poor ventilation, aging gas appliances, and inadequate weatherization—successfully winning rent control and an overhaul of the city's rental inspection program. When public decarbonization programs became available, ACCE's organized constituencies were primed to act.

ACCE has been a key partner to the state's Equitable Building Decarbonization (EBD) program (partially funded by the IRA HOMES program) and PG&E's Electrify My Block initiative specifically because of its community reach—delivering initial enrollments, providing public comment, and bringing organized community members into processes that would have proceeded without widespread resident awareness or input. ACCE has enrolled more single-family homes statewide than any other partner to EBD, and has successfully enrolled a complete block for the Electrify My Block program. ACCE's involvement in implementation has also improved EBD's program design. Organizers identified that mold remediation allocations were insufficient for Richmond's aging building stock, and that insight led to the identification of additional resources, making hundreds more homes eligible for support. Members of ACCE have also participated in work to push the California Public Utilities Commission to establish a neighborhood decarbonization pilot program, including giving tours of electrified homes to build political and community awareness to strengthen the case for a full pilot. All of these wins have demonstrated the economic, health, and environmental benefits of residential decarbonization in Richmond, while strengthening community capacity and political momentum for ACCE's next campaign: directing $550M from a Chevron settlement toward neighborhood-scale decarbonization.

Converting Collective Bargaining Power into a Citywide Green Schools Initiative

Strategies
A D

For decades, students and educators in Chicago's Black and Brown communities have attended school in buildings that pose active threats to their health—legacy coal plant pollution, industrial facilities sited in residential neighborhoods, inadequate ventilation, and aging infrastructure with no clear pathway to remediation. Recognizing the need for organized pressure to address the impacts of extreme heat on educators and students, the **Chicago Teachers Union (CTU)** began engaging with these issues with a bargaining demand for air conditioning in 2012. Over time, growing concerns about other intersecting environmental justice issues led to the formation of a climate justice committee, which became the internal organizing center for CTU's 2024 bargaining demands and the foundation for a broader coalition that would eventually unite labor, community, and government partners around a shared agenda.

This coalition, Healthy Green Schools, organizes parents, students, and educators around an agenda of detoxifying and decarbonizing Chicago's 500+ school buildings, bridging labor-community coalitions fighting for fully-funded public schools with environmental justice organizations pushing for a citywide agenda. Working with aligned school board members, the coalition secured binding commitments in CTU's 2024 contract—including 30 clean energy projects and a labor-management committee to monitor progress. Building on this success, and with a supportive mayor and school board, they won unanimous passage of the "Green Schools, Good Jobs, Bright Futures" resolution directing Chicago Public Schools to launch a Green Schools Pilot program. Building trades partnerships ensured that the 12 rooftop solar and geothermal projects would pair infrastructure upgrades with career pathways in sustainability and green construction for CPS graduates, while a Green Revolving Fund would channel project incentives into ongoing building upgrades protecting student health. The coalition has broken ground on the first projects, held a ceremony with the mayor on Earth Day, and launched a paid internship program placing CPS students in green technology roles—with the full cohort of 12 projects targeted for completion by the end of 2026.

Labor-Community Partnerships Drive Historic Wins for Autoworkers

Strategies
A B

After two unsuccessful organizing drives in 2014 and 2019, workers won a historic union election at Volkswagen (VW)'s plant—the first in the South to unionize through an election since the 1940s, and the first foreign-owned factory to be organized in the United States.

This breakthrough was built on sustained labor-community organizing. **Chattanoogans in Action for Love, Equality and Benevolence (CALEB)**, a coalition of faith-based, labor, and community groups, played an important role in educating and mobilizing community members in support of unionization both before and after the vote. CALEB mobilized and demonstrated community support for workers by sending letters to VW management, organizing rallies, turning out community members to a press conference, and engaging the public during contract negotiations and strike preparations.

Even after the successful vote, it took almost two years for VW to negotiate the first contract, only agreeing to it after feeling pressure through a community support campaign and a workforce strike. The signed contract includes a 20% wage increase, cost-of-living adjustments, improved health care, profit sharing, and stronger job security.

This win in Tennessee is a major breakthrough in the South, demonstrating that shifting the balance of economic power is indeed possible when labor and community come together, even in a challenging context. By showing that the broader community stood with workers, CALEB helped build public legitimacy for the campaign while sustaining pressure on Volkswagen through a long organizing and bargaining process.

Building the Coalition Capacity to Win and Enforce Community Benefits

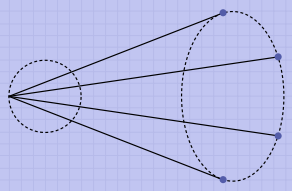
Strategies
D F

Community benefits agreement (CBA) campaigns can take years to come to fruition, requiring continued investment and perseverance through losses. Partnerships with intermediaries can help strengthen and sustain coalitions by providing corporate research, bespoke technical assistance, and training. For example, after forming the Alabama Coalition for Community Benefits, **Jobs to Move America (JMA)** worked for more than three years to negotiate a CBA with transit bus manufacturer New Flyer at its American facilities. The agreement, approved in 2022, established pre-apprenticeship, apprenticeship, and job training commitments that expanded workforce opportunities in local communities. JMA has since applied this model to support community coalitions engaging with companies across the country.

In North Carolina, **BlueGreen Alliance** is supporting community and labor partners to organize an accountability initiative (similar to a CBA) around an Albemarle lithium mining project in Kings Mountain, ensuring that the company honors its public commitment to meet rigorous environmental, social, and labor standards. Although the timeline for launching the mine has slowed, the partners are maintaining steady engagement through advisory panels, quarterly calls, ongoing relationship-building with local leaders, and community education about how strong mining standards can deliver worker and community benefits.

Pillar 2

Advocacy



Introduction

Advocacy helps create and defend the conditions that enable community-serving clean energy and infrastructure projects to move forward through formal approval points and deliver lasting benefits. In many places, outdated state and local policies, permitting rules, utility regulations, or procurement practices can prevent or discourage projects, while new challenges and project opposition can create additional barriers.

When organized constituencies and nonprofit policy advocates combine community power with policy expertise and strategically apply pressure, they can remove barriers, counter new restrictions, secure favorable policies, and turn public will into authority and binding action. This requires permanent staff capacity and policy fluency, capabilities that need sustained support to build momentum and expertise rather than short-term campaign-by-campaign funding. Advocacy can also institutionalize community influence beyond an initial win through governance structures and agreements that give communities an ongoing role in decisions about contracts, regulatory approvals, and budgets.

Strategies

A. Ensure representation at key decisions

Public dollars pass through formal decision points such as permit hearings, council votes, and procurement authorizations before they reach the ground. These are often shaped by a handful of decision-makers responding to whoever is in the room; outcomes in these moments frequently turn on participation rather than on public opinion. Advocacy at this level means knowing when decisions are scheduled and being able to make the case in terms the decision-makers have authority to act on.

B. Generate decision-ready policy, legal, and technical analysis

Successful implementation advocacy depends on producing the kinds of evidence that decision-makers can act on—regulatory analysis, legal strategies, cost and economic analysis, implementation guidance, technical testimony, model language, and fiscal analysis. The capacity is not simply conducting research but rather translating complex implementation questions into actionable recommendations for agencies, regulators, legislators, and courts.

C. Support policies that unblock projects

Some barriers are not attached to any single project but built into the rules every project navigates: permitting timelines that add cost and drive cancellations, program rules that exclude the households they were designed to serve, or legislation that blocks distributed energy resources. Advocacy that targets these conditions changes the terms for future implementation and does not depend on federal funding to advance.

D. Sustain the capacity to defend implementation against legal, regulatory, and political threats

Organizations without the capacity to respond to threats of frozen funds and program terminations can lose gains that had been secured. Defense depends on relationships and material assembled before they are needed, and on the flexibility to change venue, theory, or target while holding the goal. It also requires funders willing to sustain organizations through losses and rebuilding years.

E. Embed commitments in the rules that govern implementation

Advocacy can convert intentions into formal commitments that bind how programs and projects are implemented, from labor and community benefits attached to public contracts to seats on the bodies that oversee programs, ensuring community decision-making power.

Examples

Strategy key: **A.** Ensure representation at key decisions; **B.** Generate decision-ready policy, legal, and technical analysis; **C.** Support policies that unblock projects; **D.** Sustain the capacity to defend implementation against legal, regulatory, and political threats; **E.** Embed commitments in the rules that govern implementation

Coordinated Advocacy Secured Federal and State Support for Energy Projects in Alaska

Strategies

A D

As federal funding for clean energy increasingly came under attack in early 2025, the **Alaska Public Interest Research Group** and the **Alaska Center Education Fund** worked together to implement a coordinated advocacy and communications strategy to protect federal clean energy investments in Alaska. This included direct conversations with Alaska's congressional delegation and federal agency leaders, bringing local spokespeople affected by funding freezes to Washington, D.C. to demonstrate why these programs are vital, and elevating local stories through press events, op-eds, and earned media to highlight the impacts of federal funding losses, particularly in rural microgrid communities facing high energy burdens. An initial rapid-response press conference generated significant media attention and legislative interest, helping establish a coalition that participated in two 2025 advocacy D.C. fly-ins. These efforts contributed to the release of more than $30M in previously frozen federal funding for both the Kotzebue Electric Association and Tanana Chiefs Conference's energy projects. Building on this momentum, the coalition convened a statewide Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) stakeholder group. They developed policy recommendations that informed public comments to the Alaska Department of Health and Division of Public Assistance, which were shared with the Alaska congressional delegation, and culminated in a joint letter to state legislators addressing fuel supply, energy affordability, and drinking water emergencies. This coordinated effort helped establish the need for legislative action to increase the Revolving Bulk Fuel Loan Program cap and appropriate $11.5M for the Alaska Heating Assistance Program, the first significant state investment to supplement LIHEAP in more than a decade.

Local Coalitions Creating Enforceable Commitments

Strategies
A D E

In Texas, the **Power Up Harris County** coalition mobilized around the IRA's Solar for All federal funding opportunity to support a microgrid project in the Houston area, helping secure a nearly $250M award. Even though federal funding has been frozen, the coalition's advocacy has kept the project moving forward, including keeping the county's original commitment to workforce development and strong, enforceable labor standards. This project will develop up to 45 MW of solar and 20 MW of battery storage on county-owned sites, and requires a binding Community Workforce Agreement with labor organizations—the first time the county has required an agreement like this in its procurement process. The coalition has started building the pipeline to meet the project's planned demand for workers through Texas Climate Jobs Project's green energy pre-apprenticeship program, which has graduated 120 participants to date. Baking workforce standards into procurement itself, rather than advocating for them after contracts are signed, is what ensures that training infrastructure is connected to high-quality jobs.

In New Mexico, after more than a year of coalition work, the **Power Up Bern Co.** coalition successfully secured the passage of a first-of-its-kind community benefits resolution for companies receiving county tax breaks in Bernalillo County. This resolution includes evaluating commitments for local hiring, small business support, and environmental protection in determining both eligibility for tax breaks and the size of those savings, as well as directing at least 5% of tax savings into a community fund that can support local projects. Writing these conditions into the terms of tax breaks allows the community to directly and proactively benefit from all incoming investment, rather than negotiating for new terms case by case.

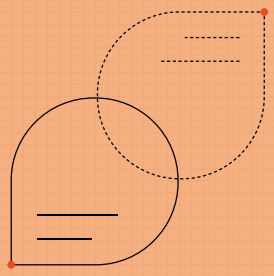
Building the Evidence Base to Promote Better Energy Policy

Strategies
A B
C D

Many of the most consequential decisions shaping the conditions for clean energy implementation occur through utility commissions and regulatory proceedings, where decisions about rates, investments, and grid planning determine whether clean energy policies translate into real-world deployment. In North Carolina, **NC Sustainable Energy Association (NCSEA)** produces independent, data-backed analyses to arm decision-makers, influential leaders, and constituents with fact-based information around energy policy. To address the challenges of a surge in data center development, proposed rate increases, and renewable energy goal rollbacks, NCSEA has commissioned research to quantify ratepayer benefits of renewables to show the impacts of key supportive renewable energy policy to date and to defend the 2050 net-zero mandate for the electricity sector. NCSEA is also pursuing research to make the case for new rules that will make solar adoption for small commercial and residential customers easier as existing statutes currently add unnecessary cost and interconnection processes. This independent analysis is important, but its influence also depends on relationships. NCSEA has decades of policy leadership experience and a robust network of energy collaborators, with a track record of showing up effectively and pragmatically with the Governor, in the legislature, and as an intervenor at the Utilities Commission.

Pillar 3

Communications



Introduction

Within every piece of policy is a story about a problem facing hard-working Americans, why government is a part of the solution, and how communities will be equipped with tools and opportunities through a policy's successful implementation. This narrative framework is deeply important, not just for building public understanding of legislation, but for aligning implementation actors around shared goals, ensuring communities are aware and can access resources, and for telling stories and documenting positive results as they emerge. Narrative and communications strategies ensure that investments in working people are accessible, meaningful, and durable. As a result, communications should be treated as a critical part of the machinery that makes policy implementation possible. We should prioritize communication and storytelling as soon as policy wins happen or even before they pass.

Strategies

A. Integrate communications into implementation planning

Building communications capacities early ensures partners have time to align on a policy narrative, identify trusted storytellers, and anticipate media incentives, benefit timing gaps, and political calendar constraints. Without early narrative leadership, communicating about successful implementation happens in a vacuum, and may face headwinds from misinformation.

B. Support state and local communications capacity

State and local communications ecosystems, which can include nonprofits, media organizations, and other communicators, need investment in their capacity to produce the stories and content that make a shared policy narrative come to life. National organizations can develop message research, narrative frameworks, and communications guidance, but state and local organizations need to be able to adapt these resources to local conditions, and connect policy to tangible community impacts. Investing in permanent state and local communications capacity and coordination across issue silos strengthens the entire implementation ecosystem by creating a two-way exchange: national strategies inform local communications, while local experience and learning continually sharpen the broader narrative.

C. Frame public investments around tangible economic benefits

Connecting tangible economic outcomes and proximate community benefits to public investment makes implementation far more meaningful than leading with legislative names or program mechanics. Communications should lead with the concrete benefits people and communities experience, such as lower household costs, a small business saving money through a rooftop solar installation, better jobs, and stronger infrastructure.

D. Support robust storytelling networks and trusted messengers

Implementation is most credible when working people see how public investment affects the lives of people in their communities who they trust. This is why it's important to invest in systems that empower community members to tell their own stories. Story banks, storyteller training, and editorial support are essential shared communications infrastructure at the state level. Dissemination is equally important. Ensuring coordination with local media, owned media, and organizations that specialize in digital organizing strategy can ensure implementation stories reach audiences where they are.

E. Coordinate partners around a shared narrative

Shared narrative frameworks give organizations across issues, geographies, and institutional roles a common foundation for explaining the purpose and value of public investment that, when repeated, can build narrative power. Consistent narrative discipline creates the highest chance of stories of implementation success gaining traction with the public. Sustaining this alignment as implementation evolves requires ongoing investment in research, coaching, training, peer learning, and national, state, and local feedback loops.

Examples

Strategy key: **A.** Integrate communications into implementation planning; **B.** Support state and local communications capacity; **C.** Frame public investments around tangible economic benefits; **D.** Support robust storytelling networks and trusted messengers; **E.** Coordinate partners around a shared narrative

Framing Policies Through Lived Experience

Strategies

B C

As new federal investments created tax credits, subsidies, and public benefits, **WorkMoney** saw an opportunity to make the value of public investment tangible in people's everyday lives. Its centralized resource center helped individuals identify and access programs that could lower household costs, while state-based organizations incorporated the tool into their canvassing and outreach. Rather than leading with policy names or program mechanics, WorkMoney focused communications on what it calls "time to value": helping people quickly experience a concrete economic benefit. A person seeking grocery assistance, for example, might discover that they also qualified for help with utilities, internet service, or tax credits. Ongoing communication through text, email, and follow-up outreach allowed WorkMoney to maintain relationships with people after they received assistance.

WorkMoney found that experiencing government benefits could itself shape how people understood public investment. After receiving assistance, the share of members agreeing that "government works for me and people like me" increased by 11 points. And when the Affordable Connectivity Program, a federal program to help low-income households pay for broadband internet service and connected devices, came under threat, WorkMoney could engage beneficiaries who understood the program's value through direct experience and were prepared to champion it. The experience demonstrates how communications rooted in tangible economic benefits can build trust in government and turn beneficiaries' lived experiences into a foundation for broader public support.

Investing in Permanent National–State Communications Infrastructure

Strategies

B D E

Progress North Carolina (Progress NC) was originally built as a central state communications hub for progressive organizations to respond, primarily, to political attacks and hold decision-makers accountable for policies that threatened working families. As new federal investments began reaching the state, the organization identified a different need: the ability to explain what successful public investment looked like and what government at all levels was working to accomplish.

With increased funding for coordination and economic message dissemination, Progress NC built permanent, year-round communications infrastructure fit to this purpose. It expanded its storyteller network, strengthened owned-media partnerships, and convened communications organizations across the state. With funder support in the form of coordination and matchmaking, it broadened its relationships beyond traditional advocacy groups to include policy organizations, implementation partners, economic development organizations, and statewide environmental justice organizations.

Over time, that infrastructure began to change how the broader communications ecosystem operated: Progress NC brought new media and storytelling organizations into its statewide tables, trained a growing network of community storytellers, and increasingly served as a vehicle for partners to coordinate and distribute shared economic messages. Its own communications output also grew substantially, from an average of roughly 65 pieces of content per month in the final five months of 2025 to 87 per month in the first half of 2026.

This shift also changed the kinds of stories Progress NC sought to tell. Rather than relying primarily on accounts of hardship and unmet need, the organization now looks for stories that connect public investments to tangible community outcomes: people confronting a challenge, accessing a new opportunity, and demonstrating what effective public policy can make possible. For example, Progress NC used its NC Voices platform to promote North Carolina's medical-debt forgiveness program, pairing an affirmative story about government action lowering household costs with targeted distribution; the story consistently became one of the platform's highest-performing pieces of economic content.

Communications still names problems and holds institutions accountable, but increasingly it also describes a positive vision for accountable, responsive government.

Increasing Credibility Through Trusted Messengers

Strategies

D E

Starting in 2023, **Resource Rural** began partnering with local organizations, Tribal Nations, farmers, educators, health care workers, and small business owners to document how increased public investment was creating new opportunities in rural communities. Through its technical assistance work with rural projects drawing on federal funds, Resource Rural connected community members to its storytelling program.

Resource Rural matched local storytellers with producers who also came from rural communities. Together, they developed stories that reflected values such as hard work, local pride, and innovation, with storytellers remaining involved throughout the process and retaining final review. Once a story was complete, Resource Rural pitched it to local media and distributed it within 100 miles of the storyteller's hometown, helping communities see their own experiences reflected back to them.

Across five message tests with more than 7,500 rural participants, messages featuring a specific, named person from the community consistently outperformed generic or technical messages. When respondents encountered a recognizable local story told by a trusted messenger, support for rural investment increased; generic or technical messages often performed no better than receiving no message at all.

Resource: Lessons From Two Years Of Storytelling In Rural America

Sustaining Alignment Through Shared Narrative

Strategies

B E

As organizations worked to support BIL, CHIPS, and IRA implementation, they spent many hours testing and refining messages. One lesson from this experience is that there is never a perfect message, but establishing a common narrative framework early is more effective than allowing competing messages to proliferate without gaining traction. BuildUS anticipated this, and made an early investment in **Winning Jobs Narrative Education (WJN)** to bring their decades of research and rigorous message testing on the economy to a network of partners, who applied it across issues, campaigns, and geographies.

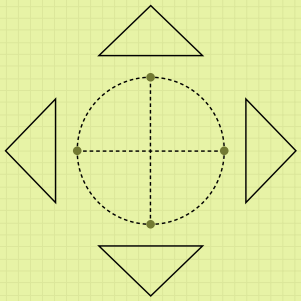
In addition to producing message guidance, WJN provided training, coaching, and hands-on support to state communications networks, advocacy organizations, and implementation partners to ensure a coordinated approach to implementation communications. Additionally, WJN provided guidance on in-state research, providing the local proof point required for some partners. This approach created a shared language around work, affordability, opportunity, government, and public investment while allowing organizations to adapt examples, messengers, and tactics to local cultural and political conditions. Alignment did not require every partner to use the same words. It gave them a common account of the economy that could be expressed through different institutional voices.

Over the past three years, WJN worked with dozens of national organizations and over 20 state partners in three states beginning in 2025. As a result, state partners reported spending less time debating basic framing and more time identifying implementation stories, developing messengers, and helping communities understand how policies connect to their lived experiences of the economy.

The framework's effectiveness came from sustained support rather than one-time guidance. Because the framework was reinforced through coaching, implementation support, peer learning, and feedback—not simply distributed as a message guide—organizations could refine it through local experience while remaining aligned across a broader ecosystem.

Pillar 4

Technical Assistance, Navigation, and Project Development



Introduction

Effective technical assistance strengthens both communities and state and local governments by complementing community knowledge and decision-making with specialized expertise. Communities possess deep knowledge of local conditions, trusted relationships, lived experience, and a clear understanding of community priorities. Yet turning public investments into meaningful outcomes often requires additional capacities—including project development, financing, regulatory navigation, consumer navigation, and implementation expertise. Technical assistance is most effective when it builds on local knowledge and leadership, and helps communities navigate complex opportunities, while enabling public agencies to manage increasingly interconnected financing, regulatory, market, and delivery systems.

The scale, complexity, and pace of opportunities created by BIL, CHIPS, and IRA made the importance of these complementary capacities especially clear, as communities and public agencies worked to design viable projects, navigate new financing and regulatory pathways, and move investments from opportunity to implementation. These capacities are especially important for historically disinvested communities, where longstanding underinvestment has limited opportunities to build them. Without targeted support, the gap between these communities and those that are well-resourced and already have strong technical capabilities will continue to widen.

Strategies

A. Fund the full project lifecycle

Provide technical support across the full project lifecycle—from opportunity identification and project development through financing, implementation, compliance, and long-term stewardship—so communities have the right expertise at the right time and projects can adapt as implementation conditions change.

B. Combine specialized and place-based expertise and capacity

Support technical assistance models that combine specialized expertise with place-based knowledge, relationships, and capacity when these are important to effective implementation. Some specialized capacities, such as legal, regulatory, or financial expertise, may be delivered more efficiently by national or regional providers, while place-based partners help tailor that expertise to local priorities and conditions, reach historically disinvested communities, and strengthen project outcomes.

C. Strengthen long-term readiness

Help organizations and leaders build the confidence, relationships, institutional knowledge, and implementation capacity needed to lead increasingly complex projects over time.

D. Provide legal navigation and de-risking infrastructure

Help communities protect awards and adapt to changing conditions during periods of political and administrative uncertainty by supporting legal, regulatory, communications, and compliance capacity.

E. Support consumer navigators and feedback loops

Household- and consumer-facing programs are effective when they combine user-friendly digital tools with trusted community navigators who help residents access benefits, overcome barriers, and create feedback loops that continuously improve program design and delivery.

F. Include peer learning and connection

Provide opportunities for grantees to gather, identify best practices, and share and compare their experiences. Grantees value having space and time to learn from others in both similar and different contexts to understand how federal agencies in different regions are approaching national requirements, and during challenging times, to keep their spirits up and encourage each other.

Examples

Strategy key: **A.** Fund the full project lifecycle; **B.** Combine specialized and place-based expertise and capacity; **C.** Strengthen long-term readiness; **D.** Provide legal navigation and de-risking infrastructure; **E.** Support consumer navigators and feedback loops; **F.** Include peer learning and connection

Standing up a Place-Based Readiness-to-Deployment Model

Strategies

A B C

Elevate Energy and **Slipstream** developed a place-based implementation navigator model that supported 20 funding proposals totaling more than $430M, including proposals from municipalities, rural and Tribal communities, and environmental justice organizations, ultimately helping secure $97M in federal awards while building local capacity to pursue future opportunities. The model paired centralized technical expertise with navigators embedded in trusted local networks serving local governments, rural communities, and environmental justice organizations to help communities and organizations navigate new opportunities created by BIL and IRA. Navigators provided tailored support to each constituency throughout the implementation lifecycle—from identifying funding opportunities and designing projects to proposal development, implementation support, and post-award capacity building through one-on-one office hours. They also created shared funding trackers, implementation and technical guides, and starter briefs to help communities access emerging opportunities more quickly. This combination allowed shared expertise and tools to be adapted to local priorities and conditions rather than delivered as one-size-fits-all technical assistance. For example, in flood-prone rural communities, conversations about clean energy investments often began with resilience, energy independence, and community preparedness rather than decarbonization.

Building Adaptive Technical Assistance Infrastructure

Strategies

A D

Recognizing that many recipients were first-time federal awardees with limited administrative capacity, **Environmental Protection Network (EPN)** and **Lawyers for Good Government (L4GG)** built support infrastructure to help grantees successfully implement their awards in support of environmental, climate, and public health projects. As actions by the Trump Administration disrupted federal climate and environmental programs nationwide, they adapted this infrastructure to integrate technical, legal, and communications support to help organizations navigate changing federal requirements, maintain compliance and implement awards when possible, respond to funding disruptions, defend their funding, recover allowable costs while preserving their legal rights, successfully close

out grants, and pursue litigation or claims-based recovery when appropriate. This infrastructure has supported more than 10,000 partners and approximately 800 grantees through biweekly updates, webinars, implementation resources, and one-on-one assistance. To date, they have helped unlock, preserve, and/or recover over $4.5B in IRA funds, helping organizations remain resilient through a period of extraordinary uncertainty.

L4GG's Elective Pay Sprint Hub, Program with the State of Washington (CETCAP), and Integrated Services Model also illustrate how the network mobilized around an important implementation opportunity that required legal support. The IRA's direct pay (elective pay) mechanism created an unprecedented opportunity to monetize clean energy tax credits for tax-exempt entities, but it also introduced tax, legal, financing, labor, and project development requirements that most nonprofit organizations had never navigated before. When the Trump Administration drastically shortened the timeline for entities to claim the credits, L4GG launched the Elective Pay Sprint Hub so that they could rapidly connect eligible entities with the specialized assistance they needed. The Hub and the CETCAP have helped 700 nonprofits, schools, Tribes, and local governments secure more than $100M (in process) in clean energy tax credits. In the face of continuing attacks and new challenges for clean energy projects, L4GG has expanded its legal assistance model and green financing team to offer pro bono assistance to connect community project owners with new impact financing.

Helping Households Navigate from Incentives to Completed Projects

Strategies

A B E

In response to the passage of BIL and IRA, a network of regional organizations in North Carolina developed **Energy Funds for All (EFA)**, a community navigation and implementation feedback model that combines user-friendly digital tools with trusted community-based navigators to help residents successfully access public energy benefits. One such program is Energy Saver NC, the state's IRA-funded home energy rebate program run by the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). To date, EFA estimates it has assisted approximately 1,200 households in accessing energy assistance programs.

EFA's model started with a mobile-accessible website that allows users to identify programs and funding opportunities, access eligibility requirements and deadlines, and view materials in eight languages. They paired this with community navigators, who are embedded in their local areas. Navigators partner with trusted organizations to provide end-to-end support to low-income households from initial outreach and application assistance through contractor selection, troubleshooting, and project completion. In these interactions, navigators also educate residents about factors that influence household energy affordability, including Duke Energy's rate-setting and planning processes, and connect them with opportunities to participate in public decision-making that affects energy costs and access.

Equally important, EFA feeds insights from their navigation experiences back to DEQ, helping improve program delivery. Based on this feedback, DEQ simplified the Energy Saver application, strengthened its collaboration with community-based organizations, incorporated cultural competency and accessibility training for contractors, and is exploring ways to sustain community navigation beyond an initial grant period.

Pairing Digital Tools with Coaching

Strategies
A B
E F

Rewiring America developed a consumer implementation infrastructure model that combines scalable digital tools, trusted human coaching, and continuous learning to help households successfully navigate public incentives to support home electrification. The model recognizes that making incentives available is not enough; households also need decision-support tools that help them navigate the complex choices between an incentive and a completed project. At the center of the model is an online planning tool that helps households identify available incentives, estimate project costs, prioritize upgrades, and develop personalized electrification plans. Rewiring paired the tool with a growing nationwide network of more than 2,000 Electric Coaches, who provide one-on-one guidance on incentives, financing, contractor selection, and project completion. They also educate peers about related local advocacy issues and how to get involved.

Rewiring also recognized that without focused attention to the barriers facing historically underserved households, a broadly available consumer-support model could reinforce rather than reduce existing disparities. Low- and moderate-income households face additional barriers, including lower trust, limited financing, contractor shortages, and unmet home repair needs. In response, Rewiring adapted its model by recruiting a diverse coach network, partnering with trusted community organizations, tailoring incentives and resources, and using demonstration projects to identify and address implementation barriers.

By the end of 2024, more than 35,000 households had created Personal Electrification Plans, users reported completing over 6,500 electrification projects, and Rewiring learned that households who worked with Electric Coaches were 50% more likely to report they were likely to complete a project than those relying on digital tools alone.

Coordinating Expertise for State Implementation

Strategies
A C
E F

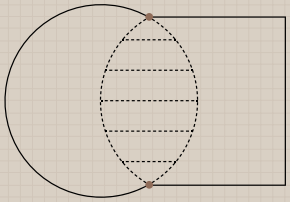
States are responsible for administering many of the largest IRA and BIL programs designed to improve energy affordability, drive economic development, reduce pollution, and expand access to clean energy. Yet many state agencies lack the expertise and staff capacity needed to design new programs, coordinate stakeholders, and fully leverage available federal resources. To help bridge the gap between federal programs and state-government implementers, the **State Support Center (SSC)** developed a coordinated technical assistance model that helps states identify implementation challenges, connect with specialized expertise, and learn from peers facing similar opportunities, rather than build every capability in-house.

Through this model, SSC provided tailored support to more than 40 states, including more intensive assistance in 12 high-ambition, capacity-constrained states. Working across a network of technical assistance partners, SSC matched states with experts on issues including Build America, Buy America compliance, direct pay, tax filing, and industrial decarbonization; coordinated assistance across providers; and adapted support as implementation needs changed. This assistance helped states secure grants, establish new programs, and tap into tax credit opportunities.

One example is SSC's support for implementation of the IRA's $8.8B Home Energy Rebates (HOMES and HEAR) programs. SSC convened a cohort of implementation partners to facilitate peer learning, synthesize lessons from early adopters, and maximize limited support resources in service of addressing common implementation challenges. Although a prolonged program freeze limited the cohort's work for a period, with new federal guidance in place, the cohort is again identifying and sharing best practices for state implementation.

Pillar 5

Government–Community Partnerships



Introduction

Publicly funded clean energy and infrastructure projects advance through formal government decisions, but their success often depends on organizations outside government that offer complementary capacities. Government agencies provide fiscal authority, administrative expertise, and institutional leverage, while community-based and nonprofit organizations contribute organized constituencies, public legitimacy, real-time community knowledge, and specialized expertise. Implementation demonstrated the importance of bringing these capacities together, as state and local governments worked to translate unprecedented federal investment into projects responsive to local conditions and priorities.

Structured partnerships bring these strengths together while preserving distinct roles. With clear working agreements, regular coordination, and mutual accountability, the relationship itself becomes an implementation infrastructure that enables partners to navigate administrative complexity, identify opportunities, adapt to changing conditions, and solve problems to keep work moving forward.

Strategies

A. Build government-community relationships before projects begin

Implementation is more successful when government agencies and community organizations have established working relationships before funding becomes available. These relationships are often built through sustained collaboration across multiple projects and funding cycles, long-term planning initiatives, advisory committees, or problem-solving around local challenges. By developing trust, shared expectations, and experience working together before a specific funding opportunity arises, partners are better positioned to move quickly and adapt as implementation becomes more complex than planned.

B. Combine complementary roles for government and community

Government entities and regional intermediaries typically bring administrative capacity, including grant management, contractor coordination, and compliance oversight, while community organizations contribute trusted relationships, local knowledge, and the ability to sustain engagement with residents. Clearly defining how each partner contributes these complementary strengths makes implementation more coordinated, effective, and durable.

C. Establish structured coordination and shared accountability

When implementing specific projects or programs, recurring check-ins, shared tracking, and clear accountability practices enable community and government partners to identify challenges early, make decisions jointly, and maintain momentum. These structures help partnerships respond consistently as projects evolve rather than relying on ad hoc communication.

D. Support government leaders who can drive community partnership

Effective government-community collaboration depends on government leaders with the credibility to influence internal decisions, the commitment to partner with community organizations, and the authority and capacity to pursue new ways of working. These leaders are most effective when they have clear responsibility, dedicated time and authority to advance partnership commitments, and institutional support that ensures continuity beyond any one individual. Equipped to navigate government processes and advance collaborative solutions, they become trusted counterparts for community partners.

E. Build administrative flexibility into program design

Implementation rarely goes according to plan. Government agencies can improve implementation by identifying in advance where timelines, budgets, procurement, reporting requirements, and regulatory processes can be adjusted without undermining accountability. Building this flexibility into program design allows partners to respond to changing conditions without negotiating exceptions under pressure.

F. Create cross-agency coordination capacity

Many implementation projects require coordination across multiple agencies, making explicit cross-agency mechanisms essential for aligning timelines, funding, and regulatory processes. Coordination should also make government easier for communities to navigate by connecting related programs and enabling staff to help stakeholders reach the right agency or program rather than requiring them to navigate government structures themselves. This allows implementation partners to engage government as a coordinated system rather than a collection of separate agencies.

Examples

Strategy key: **A.** Build government-community relationships before projects begin; **B.** Combine complementary roles for government and community; **C.** Establish structured coordination and shared accountability; **D.** Support government leaders who can drive community partnership; **E.** Build administrative flexibility into program design; **F.** Create cross-agency coordination capacity

Unlocking County Investment in Public Housing Decarbonization

Strategies

A C D

Pennsylvania United (PA United) is a grassroots, member-led community organizing and advocacy organization focused on building political power for working-class people in Pennsylvania. It brought together labor, environmental, and clean energy advocates, public housing authorities, local governments, and community organizations around a shared agenda to advance housing and climate resilience while creating good union jobs. A dedicated coordinator embedded at PA United, with institutional trust and deep organizational knowledge, managed the partnership with the Allegheny County Executive's Office, convened partners, and sustained coordination across the coalition. This infrastructure helped address a critical implementation gap: while public housing authorities, municipalities, and

school districts stand to benefit significantly from clean energy investments, developing and financing these projects falls outside their core mission and often exceeds their internal capacity.

The value of dedicated coordination capacity became especially clear when the coalition encountered setbacks. When the partnership's $20M grant application to an IRA program was declined, the coalition coordinator held the structure together—maintaining call cadence, sustaining partner engagement, and keeping morale intact through a period that could easily have caused the coalition to dissolve. By sustaining the coordination function, they turned collaboration around a single funding opportunity into durable implementation capacity. That investment paid off: the County allocated $1M of its own budget to fund a decarbonization pilot—the first time county funds had been used for a project of this kind. The pilot has since directly informed the development of the proposed Pennsylvania Energy Savings and Jobs Fund, legislation planned for introduction in 2027 that would provide affordable financing and wraparound support to replicate Allegheny County's success across communities throughout the Commonwealth.

Bringing Home Energy Upgrades to Southern Minnesota

Strategies
A B
C D

Home energy upgrade programs in southern Minnesota were failing to reach many Latino households that stood to benefit. Regional government agencies had the capacity to secure funding and administer programs, but language barriers, limited trust, and the absence of community-based outreach meant many families never accessed available resources. Building upon their existing relationship, the community-based organization **Convivencia Hispana** and the **Region Nine Development Commission (Region 9)**, a government agency that focuses on regional planning and economic development, designed a partnership to close this gap.

Region 9 contributed the administrative and technical capacity needed to secure a federal Department of Energy Innovative Prize and manage its implementation, while Convivencia Hispana designed the program and contributed trusted community relationships, bilingual outreach, and culturally grounded participant support. Together, the partners established an integrated implementation model. Region 9 managed grant administration, contractor coordination, and compliance, while Convivencia Hispana mobilized trusted community members as energy navigators who could enroll participants, troubleshoot barriers, and sustain participant engagement through a complex and often frustrating process. The two organizations coordinated these complementary functions throughout implementation, allowing trusted community engagement and administrative delivery to reinforce one another.

The partnership registered 170 households—nearly 10% of St. James' occupied housing stock—for home energy audits, completed 143 comprehensive energy audits, and supported 56 home energy upgrades, including insulation, heat pumps, heat pump water heaters, and high-efficiency furnaces. It also built lasting implementation capacity by training local energy navigators, strengthening Convivencia Hispana's expertise in grant-funded clean energy programs, and creating trusted community infrastructure that can support future public investment. The experience demonstrates that aligning administrative capacity and trusted community partners can expand both the reach and durability of implementing public investments.

Resource: Powering Our Communities: Saving Money and Energy in Rural Minnesota

Turning Crisis into Resilience in Western North Carolina

Strategies

A B C
D F

In the fall of 2024, Hurricane Helene exposed critical weaknesses in western North Carolina's energy resilience, leaving communities without power, water, and internet connectivity for extended periods because the region's rural, mountainous geography made restoring these essential services especially difficult. In the immediate response to Helene, local community groups self-organized to provide mutual aid and assistance to communities cut off from public resources, while Footprint Project, a clean energy disaster response nonprofit, worked with community partners and regional nonprofits like **Invest Appalachia**, **Appalachian Voices**, and the Appalachian Solar Finance Fund to quickly deploy mobile solar and battery systems that restored power, communications, and critical community services while permanent infrastructure was being repaired.

The experience demonstrated the need for both permanent and mobile resilience infrastructure to strengthen communities before, during, and after future disasters. Building on relationships established during Helene response, several partners began to develop a coordinated energy resilience strategy, with Footprint Project providing technical support, Appalachian Voices leading community engagement, and Invest Appalachia and the Appalachian Solar Finance Fund providing creative financing to help launch a growing network of regional "resilience hubs"—community facilities and local anchor spaces that had served as natural rallying points during Helene and could serve as energy-resilient community resource hubs and shelters during future emergencies once equipped with solar and battery storage.

Developing this resilience infrastructure depended on complementary inside-outside government partnerships. The Land of Sky Regional Council (LOSRC), a regional council of governments, brought the relationships, credibility, convening authority, and leadership needed to effectively manage public funding. They coordinated local governments and community partners around a shared resilience plan, with a staff leader who had the vision to pursue a new model of collaboration and institutional influence to advance it. Together, these complementary capacities—later strengthened by fundraising and advocacy support from the NC Sustainable Energy Association—enabled the coalition to develop a regional resilience initiative, secure the redirection of $5M in uncommitted BIL funding administered by the North Carolina State Energy Office, and coordinate implementation across six western North Carolina counties while ensuring project selection reflected community priorities and equity considerations.

Invest Appalachia added a financing strategy that paired the BIL funding with the IRA's Investment Tax Credit by deploying flexible, low-to-no-interest bridge financing—supported in part by BuildUS—to cover costs until tax credit reimbursement. This approach allows public funding to cover roughly 70% of project costs while leveraging private capital to finance the remainder, expanding the initiative's reach, supporting more robust projects, and demonstrating how flexible private and philanthropic capital can amplify the impact of federal investments.

The initiative will deploy 24 stationary microgrids alongside two mobile resilience hubs equipped with solar power, battery storage, and satellite internet that can be deployed anywhere in the state following future disasters. Results are starting to emerge: the partners have selected a first cohort of six projects and recently processed the tax credits for the first stationary microgrid at a local food pantry, which is now underway.

Resources: A Swarm of Solar 'Bees' Are Coming to Western North Carolina Community Hubs; Resilience Has An Address In WNC; Resourcing Appalachian Resilience After Helene

Building Implementation Capacity for a Community-Led Energy Transition

Strategies
A B

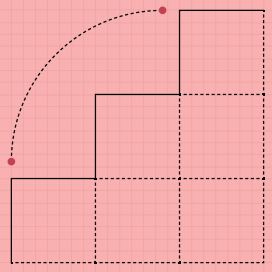
Small, rural communities often struggle to capitalize on major public infrastructure investments because they lack all of the capacities needed to deliver complex projects. Recognizing these challenges, the City of Enfield, North Carolina created **Enfield Energy Futures**, a partnership of local government, community organizations, universities, nonprofit partners, and technical experts focused on advancing a clean energy transition shaped by and designed to benefit the community.

When the City was preparing to carry out an American Rescue Plan Act-funded water infrastructure modernization project, the coalition saw an opportunity to use the planned trenching for new water lines to launch one of the nation's first municipal utility-owned geothermal energy networks, significantly reducing excavation costs. Existing partnerships and modest, flexible philanthropic support allowed Enfield to move quickly to develop the project and leverage IRA Investment Tax Credits, stretching limited philanthropic dollars much further. The coalition rapidly brought in the specialized technical, financing, engineering, and workforce partners it needed, and secured the state agency approvals needed to align the two projects. At the same time, they created a new nonprofit to provide a permanent home for fundraising, communications, and regional coordination, and a vehicle to receive philanthropic funds to get started. Community members are shaping the work through education sessions, surveys, youth ambassadors, and oral history interviews, while workforce partners are building training pathways with schools, community colleges, and HBCUs so local residents benefit directly from the investment. Although implementation is still underway, Enfield demonstrates how a shared vision and durable government-community partnerships can position communities to seize emerging opportunities.

Resource: Tiny North Carolina town takes a big step toward geothermal energy

Pillar 6

Workforce Development



Introduction

Successful workforce development takes more than building additional training programs. The scale of clean energy, infrastructure, and manufacturing projects catalyzed by BIL, CHIPS, and IRA created a significant need to expand apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs to meet this increased demand for skilled workers. However, these programs alone cannot ensure that workers complete multi-year training pathways, connect to high-quality jobs, or that employers have access to the skilled workforce they need. Effective workforce development depends on an interconnected ecosystem that aligns employers, government, training providers, labor organizations, community partners, and supportive services to recruit workers, sustain their participation, and connect them to quality jobs. Without these complementary capacities, workforce investments can struggle to translate into lasting employment opportunities and an equitable, skilled workforce.

Strategies

A. Create demand for quality jobs through labor agreements and hiring commitments

Project labor agreements, local-hire rules, and other commitments attached to public and private investments establish job quality standards and create demand for family-sustaining jobs ready for trainees when they complete their programs. Public project owners also have leverage to drive those standards when working with contractors and unions.

B. Build a workforce that includes historically disinvested communities

A workforce that reflects the communities where projects are built is not an automatic outcome of public investment, as the trades can reproduce existing patterns of who enters them. Deliberate outreach through community-based organizations and training providers can open these careers to workers who have been historically excluded from them.

C. Fund the coordination that connects job-seekers, training, employers, and labor

The workforce ecosystem is fragmented across programs, employers, unions, and community organizations that might not communicate data and timelines to one another. Intermediaries that coordinate across them can match training capacity to actual hiring demand.

D. Pair training with the wraparound services workers need to finish

Barriers that lead people to leave careers—lack of childcare and transportation, equipment costs, income gaps—hit hardest during unpaid training and early on in apprenticeships, but can also emerge well into a program or after graduation. Dedicated case management that follows workers from pre-apprenticeship onward, paired with referral partnerships for supportive services, can help retain a larger skilled workforce.

Examples

Strategy key: **A.** Create demand for quality jobs through labor agreements and hiring commitments; **B.** Build a workforce that includes historically disinvested communities; **C.** Fund the coordination that connects job-seekers, training, employers, and labor; **D.** Pair training with the wraparound services workers need to finish

Building the Demand for Good Jobs in Wisconsin Through Utility Commitments

Strategies

A

Climate Jobs National Resource Center (CJNRC) supported years of advocacy by Wisconsin unions, ultimately leading to a pledge in 2024 from four major utilities to hire union workers for clean energy development projects tied to federal incentives under the IRA, which will require more than 18,000 construction jobs through 2030. With that demand established, the building trades in Milwaukee are working on apprenticeships to train a diverse set of workers for the anticipated 16 GW of deployment.

The pledge has also helped create a base of community and worker support for clean energy. This base has proved critical to overcome local and state permitting hurdles, and CJNRC has supported the building trades, including LiUNA, the Carpenters, IUOE, and IBEW, to mobilize members to attend Public Service Commission hearings and testify. And in 2025, with union and community support, Wisconsin approved its first utility-scale wind project since 2011, a 118 MW project that will create up to 200 local union construction jobs, demonstrating that the pledge is already translating into real jobs on the ground.

Coordinating Job Pipelines in Milwaukee

Strategies

A B C

In Milwaukee, the Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership | Building Industry Group Skilled Trades Employment Program (WRTP | BIG STEP) led construction-sector coordination and job training for the Investing in America Workforce Hub. BIL funding supported nearly $100M in infrastructure projects in the city, including the replacement of all lead service lines within ten years.

Projected hiring demand, especially at the city and statewide levels, is often disconnected from recruitment, training, and job placements because employers, unions, training providers, and community organizations operate independently from one another. WRTP | BIG STEP has addressed this problem by building and coordinating relationships across nearly 300 high-road employers, more than 70 labor partners, and over 100 community-based organizations across the state. Each part of this network is critical as employers commit to quality job opportunities, labor partners facilitate apprenticeships, and community organizations provide reach and trust in underserved communities. That structure, combined with targeted outreach and recruitment, needs assessments, and barrier remediation services (transportation, financial assistance, childcare, and more), has allowed WRTP | BIG STEP to achieve a 93% placement rate with union trades. They serve more than 2,000 individuals a year across the construction, manufacturing, and water sectors, nearly 70% of whom identify as people of color and about one-third of whom have been justice-involved.

Building Water Infrastructure Training Programs in Pittsburgh

Strategies

B

The Aspinwall, Bruecken, and Clearwell (ABC) Project, a $193M, partially BIL-funded, five-year initiative to rehabilitate Pittsburgh's drinking water infrastructure, is the largest construction project in Pittsburgh Water's history. But the scale of the project presented an immediate workforce challenge: maintaining enough skilled construction workers across three sites for the duration of a multi-year project in a regional construction industry where only 6.7% of workers are people of color and nearly a quarter are over 55 and approaching retirement. Without intentional intervention, the jobs created by the project are unlikely to reach communities most directly affected by the project, including the Lincoln-Lemington-Belmar and Aspinwall neighborhoods.

Partner4Work, the workforce development board for Allegheny County and the City of Pittsburgh, partnered with Pittsburgh Water to embed a pre-apprenticeship training program directly into the ABC project site. The program builds on Partner4Work's established 4Construction model, which has previously placed pre-apprentices on the Pittsburgh International Airport Terminal Modernization Project and other large development projects. Partner4Work is working with three community-based training providers—the Trade Institute of Pittsburgh, A. Philip Randolph Institute, and Pittsburgh Gateways—to recruit and train workers who have historically faced systemic barriers to construction careers, including people of color, women, justice-impacted individuals, and low-income job seekers. Graduates are guaranteed direct entry into three skilled trades unions in the region, with additional pathways to entry-level roles at Pittsburgh Water and a newly established Stationary Engineer Apprenticeship Program.

The initiative is designed as a demonstration of how workforce equity can be embedded into public infrastructure investment. Partner4Work plans to apply what it learns to its application later this year for a federal funding opportunity that supports dislocated workers and youth entering the workforce, and Pittsburgh Water is developing a broader regional workforce consortium that aligns hiring needs across sectors, shares best practices, and expands inclusive career pathways for residents throughout Allegheny County.

Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce in Nashville

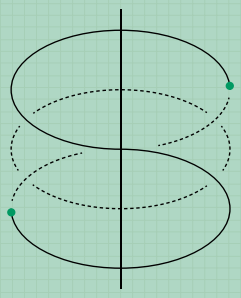
Strategies

A B D

Nashville's quickly growing construction industry has presented a significant opportunity for workforce development. However, disparities in access to training and career pathways persist, particularly for women, communities of color, and other marginalized groups. **Music City Construction Careers (MC3)** was founded to address this challenge with an apprenticeship readiness program that creates pathways to union construction careers in Nashville, using the North American Building Trades Unions' 120-hour Multi-Craft Core Curriculum, which prioritizes participants for placement into federally registered apprenticeship programs. Recognizing the barriers that disproportionately impact underserved communities, MC3 has been pursuing targeted outreach, culturally relevant programming, and information in multiple languages to better engage the communities they are focused on serving. Additionally, they are currently implementing dedicated case management that follows apprentices over time to address emerging needs during the program duration, as well as developing referral partnerships for wraparound services rather than trying to provide everything in-house. To date, the program has graduated 464 participants with a 76% placement rate into apprenticeship pathway careers. In addition, MC3 has worked to establish memoranda of understanding with agencies, unions, and private companies—one encouraging Tennessee Valley Authority contractors to prioritize MC3 graduates and another granting priority to companies that hire MC3 graduates on metro Nashville projects—helping ensure participants have clear pathways into high-quality jobs.

Pillar 7

Capital and Financing



Introduction

New tax credits, grants, and loan programs within BIL and IRA changed the math for community-scale and residential clean energy and infrastructure projects in places that had rarely seen this kind of investment. And for the first time, schools, houses of worship, nonprofit food banks, and small municipalities had an easier path to own these projects and keep the revenue they generated, because new provisions like direct pay meant tax-exempt entities could finally capture the full value of the credits.

However, using these new provisions and programs took education, legal help, deal structuring, organizational capacity, and upfront capital that most community groups and households didn't have. To solve these issues, a network of investors, developers, community organizations, technical assistance providers, and legal partners has come together over the last few years to help communities and households actually use these programs and to build a market for community-driven projects at scale. These types of projects are routinely dismissed by conventional lenders given their size or perceived risk, and the capital that does reach them is often priced or structured in ways that make it hard to deploy. When financing models are designed for projects at this scale and the intermediaries that help these projects come together are resourced, more communities and households can own and benefit from clean energy and infrastructure deployment.

Strategies

A. Provide projects and financial intermediaries with capital

Direct grants, guarantees, loan loss reserves, and working capital loans can help move projects from initial design to construction. Completed projects generate revenue that can seed the next one and build the track record that makes future deals easier to finance.

B. Build the infrastructure needed to use new financing tools and funding programs

New financing mechanisms and new government funding programs require organizations to understand new rules, structure projects appropriately, assemble financing, comply with legal requirements, and navigate new administrative processes—which can take a constellation of partners as organizations move through the stages. Legal partners also shape the conditions projects operate in, supporting how public programs get designed and intervening in the regulatory proceedings that determine what is possible in a given market.

C. Support work that unlocks state and local public financing tools

Municipal bonds and state revolving funds are examples of other public financing tools that communities can use, but they require coalitions to demand them, officials who understand the options, and technical help to structure them. They are also a place where communities can specify terms that matter—labor standards, community benefits, and who ultimately owns and governs what gets built. Funding that groundwork lets communities keep moving projects regardless of changes at the federal level.

D. Design ownership structures intentionally from the start

Public investment can shift economic power when communities don't just receive economic activity but shape ownership structures, retain long-term value, and build institutions that govern how benefits are distributed.

E. Reduce project transaction costs through coordination, bundling, and standardization

Aggregating projects, standardizing financial models and documentation, and creating shared systems can lower costs and strengthen negotiating power, which is especially critical for historically disinvested and underinvested communities, whose projects have too often been deemed too risky, too small, or too complex to finance.

F. Invest in digital platforms and tools

Platforms can help move capital more efficiently by matching projects to different funding sources and resources. Well-designed tools make programs usable for the households and small contractors they are meant to serve, and reduce friction in managing distributed assets and reporting for government compliance.

Examples

Strategy key: **A.** Provide projects and financial intermediaries with capital; **B.** Build the infrastructure needed to use new financing tools and funding programs; **C.** Support work that unlocks state and local public financing tools; **D.** Design ownership structures intentionally from the start; **E.** Reduce project transaction costs through coordination, bundling, and standardization; **F.** Invest in digital platforms and tools

Building Community Wealth Through Renewable Energy Projects in North Carolina

Strategies

A D

While most clean energy projects generate long-term financial returns for developers and investors, communities that host them, particularly historically disinvested communities, often receive few lasting economic benefits beyond construction jobs or modest energy savings. In North Carolina, **EnerWealth Solutions, LLC** developed the McDowell Creek Solar Project, a 2.6 MW solar array that is expected to begin generating electricity at the end of 2026, to demonstrate how clean energy projects can also generate ongoing community wealth. This project combines the IRA Investment Tax Credit, including an energy community bonus credit, with loans, tax equity, and philanthropic grant funding to finance construction. A 10-year power purchase agreement with EnergyUnited and a commitment from Mecklenburg County to purchase the project's Renewable Energy Credits create a stable revenue stream. After operating costs and debt service, project revenues will be shared through two mechanisms: monthly dividend

payments to low-income residents and a community-governed benefits fund. This approach will provide a cohort of low-income households with guaranteed monthly cash payments decoupled from utility bills, while some of the annual profits will flow into a community-governed fund where subscribers collectively determine how to reinvest shared revenue in local priorities. In this model, EnerWealth is piloting an approach that treats solar development as a vehicle for direct income support and participatory reinvestment, intentionally extending the benefits of clean energy beyond bill savings to broader forms of community wealth-building.

Addressing Procurement and Financing Friction in Minnesota

Strategies
A B E

Small rural municipalities often lack the staff, financing, and procurement capacity to pursue clean energy projects, even when public incentives are available. Individual projects can be too small to bond, too short-term for conventional bank financing, and too administratively burdensome for part-time municipal staff to manage.

West Central Initiative (WCI), a regional community foundation in Minnesota, addressed these barriers by building on years of trusted relationships with rural municipalities to convene a municipal solar cohort and create a coordinated implementation model. WCI combined peer learning, technical assistance, conservative financial analysis, and project management with innovative financing and procurement tools. It developed customized solar and cash-flow analyses for each municipality and created a 0% revolving loan product to bridge the timing gap before direct pay tax credits and utility rebates were received. It also partnered with Lakes Country Service Cooperative to bundle projects into a single procurement process that reduced administrative burden and strengthened vendor interest. Flexible funding also enabled participating communities to add battery storage when lower-than-expected construction costs created additional opportunities.

The first cohort enabled 10 rural communities to move from planning to construction while combining direct pay tax credits, utility rebates, municipal investment, and bridge financing into viable capital stacks. Together, the projects are projected to save participating municipalities nearly $1.5M over 30 years, with several communities expanding projects to include battery storage that strengthens local resilience. Due to the success of the model, a second cohort has formed to pursue 11 more municipal solar projects projected to save the participating communities more than $1.1M over the project lifetimes.

Resource: Powering Our Communities: Saving Money and Energy in Rural Minnesota

Connecting Projects with Resources Through Digital Platforms

Strategies

E F

Recognizing the sheer number of communities that had never received a federal grant before, **Milken Institute's Community Infrastructure Center (CIC)** built a tool to serve thousands of organizations, helping connect them to state agencies, capital providers, and technical assistance, from the stage of pre-development onward. It also functions as a knowledge hub, matching projects with tens of thousands of federal, state, and local opportunities, providing project readiness assessments, and storing thousands of crowdsourced datasets, webinars, and guidebooks. From the beginning, the CIC has been program and project type agnostic, supporting infrastructure projects broadly, and the team has worked to avoid being a gatekeeper by pursuing interoperability with other systems and creating an open network where anyone can contribute and download all publicly available data.

In response to changes in federal funding, the team began dedicating more time to helping project sponsors identify alternative capital sources by hosting virtual deal rooms, where they invited capital providers including community development financial institutions (CDFIs), green banks, credit unions, private credit, and impact capital to connect with sponsors and learn more about their specific needs. When one nonprofit developer presented to 12 capital providers through CIC's process, five returned with attractive offers, an outcome that previously took the organization 18 months. Initially committing to monthly deal rooms, the team is now running six to eight deal rooms a month given increased demand. To date, over 800 projects have been enrolled on the CIC and the team has hosted 45 deal rooms, spotlighting over $2B in total project capex.

Investing in Technology to Improve Customer and Partner Experience

Strategies

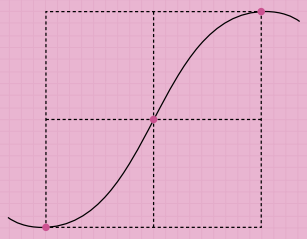
F

Capital Good Fund, a CDFI, won a federal award to bring residential and commercial rooftop solar and battery storage leases to community organizations and low-income households. To scale its operations and hit its long-term deployment goals, the organization identified a suite of interconnected technology needs that its federal award couldn't fully cover: asset management software to monitor distributed solar systems across multiple states; contractor portals through which solar and HVAC installers can upload scopes of work, track referred customers, and request payments; a data system to collect and report hundreds of federally required data points including customer demographics, system performance, and contractor compliance; and automated lease pricing tools integrated with solar design software. The overall goal has been to create a low-friction experience for low-income households and locally owned installers and contractors, including those that are minority- and/or woman-owned, while maintaining the compliance and reporting capacity that federal programs require.

However, the termination of their federal award has forced the team to focus primarily on securing capital priced and structured for actual deployment, absorbing attention the organization had expected to be spending on operations and customer experience. Low-income households are often selecting financing options based on price, speed, and ease, not mission, and a mission-driven institution that can't match a conventional lender on experience can lose those customers. This is why their technology infrastructure has remained an important operational backbone, allowing Capital Good Fund to continue serving its customers and partners effectively while it has built project pipelines, safe harbored equipment to preserve clean energy tax credit eligibility, and secured new capital sources.

Pillar 8

Research and Data Tracking



Introduction

Research and data systems are critical implementation infrastructure because they enable continuous learning throughout the implementation process. By tracking investments, preserving institutional knowledge, and generating evidence, they help policymakers, practitioners, and the public understand what funding is available, what has been distributed, and whether investments are reaching intended beneficiaries. The breadth and scale of investments made through BIL, CHIPS, and IRA underscored the importance of this infrastructure, as funding flowed through multiple programs, agencies, and levels of government and implementation unfolded differently across places. This information can also help identify barriers to accessing resources, improve programs over time, and inform future policy decisions. Because BuildUS's investments in this capacity were relatively limited compared to other ecosystem capacities, the strategies elevated represent only a portion of the broader research and learning ecosystem needed to support implementation at scale.

Strategies

A. Support publicly accessible, independent investment, award, and project tracking

Implementation benefits from trusted, publicly accessible tracking systems that document where investments are flowing, how projects are progressing, and which communities are benefiting. Effective systems integrate multiple data sources into accessible dashboards that support policymakers, journalists, researchers, practitioners, and local leaders while increasing transparency, enabling better decision-making, and strengthening public accountability.

B. Preserve public data and institutional knowledge through political transitions

Implementation knowledge is vulnerable to political transitions, staff turnover, and changing agency priorities. Preserving datasets, guidance, case studies, templates, and implementation resources helps ensure that practitioners and researchers can continue to track funding flows, use valuable resources and tools developed by public agencies, and learn about investments and the ongoing work related to these investments, even when government systems change.

C. Use research and analysis to improve continuing implementation and future policy

Research and analysis strengthen implementation by helping policymakers and practitioners make better decisions before, during, and after implementation. Evidence can identify emerging opportunities, inform state and local policy development, evaluate the impacts of public investments, and generate insights that improve future policy design. Strong research systems connect scholars, practitioners, public agencies, communities, and other constituencies to translate complex analysis into practical guidance that supports decision-making throughout implementation rather than only assessing outcomes after programs conclude.

Examples

Strategy key: **A.** Support publicly accessible, independent investment, award, and project tracking; **B.** Preserve public data and institutional knowledge through political transitions; **C.** Use research and analysis to improve continuing implementation and future policy

Public Portals and Trackers

Strategies

A

Atlas Public Policy addressed the challenge of tracking a massive, complex web of federal investment funding from BIL and IRA by developing publicly accessible implementation tracking tools—including the Climate Program Portal, Water Program Portal, and Clean Economy Tracker—that aggregate federal data into searchable dashboards tracking awards, projects, jobs, private investment, and geographic impacts. As implementation conditions shifted following the federal transition, Atlas expanded these tools to track funding freezes, project cancellations, litigation, and changing implementation guidance.

MIT's Center for Energy and Environmental Policy Research Clean Investment Monitor complements this work by tracking public and private investment in clean energy manufacturing and deployment, providing a consistent quarterly picture of investment trends, manufacturing growth, consumer adoption, and the effects of federal policy across states and congressional districts.

Together, these tools provide policymakers, practitioners, journalists, and communities with accessible, real-time information on where investments are flowing, how projects are progressing, and how implementation conditions change as funding freezes, litigation, and administrative actions emerge.

Data Preservation Infrastructure

Strategies
B

As federal priorities shifted and implementation resources began disappearing from agency websites, practitioners, communities, and researchers faced the prospect of losing valuable implementation knowledge. **Data for Progress** worked with outgoing Department of Energy staff and partners to preserve Community Benefits Plan guidance, datasets, templates, case studies, and implementation resources by archiving them in publicly accessible repositories, ensuring that communities and practitioners retained access to critical implementation knowledge after federal websites and data systems changed. Working with various partners, they are using the data tools they developed to support and help build and resource a community of practice around negotiating Community Benefits Agreements and Project Labor Agreements—and high-level labor and community benefits provisions more generally—in a number of states. Atlas Public Policy adopted a similar approach by creating American Energy Stories to preserve stories previously housed by the Department of Energy, while organizing a network of communicators to expand the collection and help local organizations use these stories to communicate clean energy progress in their communities.

Research That Improves Implementation and Future Policy

Strategies
C

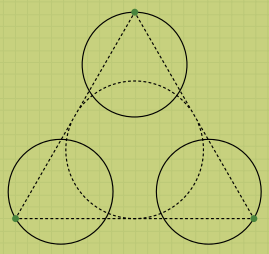
RMI's Cleantech-Led Economic Development Strategy helped state and regional leaders in South Carolina identify competitive industries, workforce opportunities, financing strategies, and regional advantages—and use those insights to make more strategic use of investments catalyzed by BIL, CHIPS, and IRA. By combining state-specific economic analysis with stakeholder engagement, RMI brought together economic development organizations, policymakers, businesses, workforce leaders, and community stakeholders to develop place-based growth strategies tailored to local conditions. The initiative demonstrates how applied research can translate complex data and federal investment opportunities into practical implementation strategies.

Complementing this applied work, **EconClimate Lab**'s Nation-Building at Home project and the **Washington Center for Equitable Growth** are building a broader evidence base on how industrial policy and implementation affect workers, communities, regional development, and economic opportunity. Together, these efforts illustrate how research can support continuous learning during implementation while strengthening future policy design.

These efforts demonstrate that successful implementation requires not only delivering projects but learning from them as they unfold. Research can identify emerging opportunities, test which approaches produce stronger outcomes, and generate evidence that improves both current implementation and future policy design.

Pillar 9

Ecosystem Builders



Introduction

Ecosystem builders are organizations that connect, coordinate, and strengthen the capabilities needed for successful implementation. They create effective implementation networks in places that enable communities to access the right support at the right time, while building long-term local leadership and institutional capacity. The scale and complexity of implementation under BIL, CHIPS, and IRA made the importance of this role especially clear. Communities often had trusted local leadership and strong place-based institutions, but lacked some of the specialized expertise, resources, and information needed to navigate complex projects and new funding opportunities.

Ecosystem builders help fill these gaps by identifying implementation needs and opportunities; connecting communities with trusted technical assistance providers, funders, financing partners, and other specialists; and recruiting or developing new partners where critical capabilities are missing. They also facilitate peer learning and help replicate successful models across communities. By reducing the costs of assembling the implementation capacities communities need, ecosystem builders can accelerate projects while strengthening community power and collective ownership, resulting in communities that are better equipped to pursue future opportunities.

Examples

Building Power Resource Center

Building Power Resource Center (BPRC) was created in the wake of the IRA's passage to connect community organizers and local government leaders to translate ambitious decarbonization policy into tangible economic and climate outcomes, while also building community power. BPRC provides intensive, wraparound strategy and technical assistance as well as funding to a national cohort of community organizations, unions, and local governments—the Building Power Network (BPN). Central to BPRC's approach is an inside-outside strategy: grassroots coalitions build the political conditions to win popular programs from the outside, while BPRC and its partners collaborate directly with champions inside the government to design and execute them. Community and government leaders share responsibility for winning commitments and ensuring that projects are implemented so that their benefits are visible and felt by the broader community. Monthly peer learning sessions, in-depth coaching, and deliberate network-building allow BPN partners to develop local capacity while drawing on the collective experience of the full cohort so that a lesson learned in one city can inform strategy in another.

For select partners, BPRC also acts as an incubator to help successful local implementation models scale statewide. For example, over the past two years, BPRC worked with the Ohio Organizing Collaborative (OOC) and the Columbus School District, the largest school district in the state, to transition all 130+ school buildings in the district to clean energy. In 2025, OOC successfully advocated for a district-wide school decarbonization policy and the school district

has already implemented a suite of electrification projects. BPRC is now working with OOC to build on this experience by co-developing a statewide strategy to adapt and expand the model to at least three additional school districts.

Overall, BPRC's cohort grew from seven partners in 2024 to 26 across 13 states and D.C. in 2026, advancing six implementation models, including school decarbonization, neighborhood-scale electrification, public housing upgrades, and thermal energy networks. In 2025, half of BPN partners completed or began solar or building decarbonization projects, supported by BPRC-managed feasibility studies across 50 project sites. Six BPRC-supported resolutions also passed unanimously in city councils or school boards. The approach demonstrates how an ecosystem builder can accelerate implementation by organizing key capacities around the needs of locally rooted partners advancing projects on the ground.

Resource Rural

Resource Rural was created to help rural communities and Native Nations seize BIL, CHIPS, and IRA opportunities by mobilizing philanthropic resources through 17 trusted, place-based *Local Resource Partners*[1] and coalitions spanning 43 states and more than 50 Native Nations. These partners already have deep relationships with local communities and experience supporting community and economic development. Resource Rural strengthens their implementation capacity with funding so they can extend grant development, project planning, financial structuring, compliance support, and specialized technical assistance to more communities. Recognizing that organizing and advocacy capacity is especially limited in many rural communities, their team also provides coaching, campaign planning, power mapping, strategic communications, peer learning, and funding to help local organizations shape implementation and build long-term community capacity. Additionally, they built a storytelling program that helps make the benefits of public funding visible in communities.

In 2024 and 2025, Resource Rural's network helped more than 540 communities pursue over 500 grant opportunities, securing more than $400M in funding. In addition, Resource Rural's partners secured $1.2B for clean energy projects funded by the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund[2].

North Carolina illustrates the type of statewide implementation ecosystem Resource Rural helps cultivate. It engaged MDC, Inc. as its designated Local Resource Partner, strengthening its role as a statewide intermediary supporting equitable climate and economic development, while supporting We Are Down Home (WDH) with research and campaign development to influence how federal funding was being implemented in rural counties. Through its Storytelling Program, Resource Rural worked with these and other partners to produce stories about local implementation successes and built relationships with communicators and local leaders across the state.

As these relationships deepened, Resource Rural identified a shared interest between MDC and WDH in developing community-led resilience infrastructure and helped turn it into a coordinated strategy. WDH brought organizing capacity to build support for public investment in resilience hubs, while MDC contributed collaboration and project-planning expertise and connections through the North Carolina Inclusive Disaster Recovery Network it facilitates. Resource Rural also connected with an existing partner and BuildUS grantee, Invest Appalachia, which

[1] These are rural organizations and Native-led groups that equip their communities and neighbors with the tools to build shared prosperity and strong local economies.

[2] Most of the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund resources have been clawed back or are currently being litigated.

was part of a coalition advancing resilience hub and solar microgrid development in Helene-impacted western North Carolina. Invest Appalachia then connected them with Footprint Project for microgrid technical assistance. After that, several of the partners worked with the Resilience Hub Collaborative to train a cohort of community leaders in resilience hub design and management in July 2026. At the training, the groups showed a new video, produced by Resource Rural's Storytelling Program with Appalachian Voices, Land of Sky, and Footprint Project, that explains the importance of resilient power infrastructure for disaster recovery through the story of a rural fire chief in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene.

Over two years, these connections have helped turn a collection of organizations into an increasingly integrated statewide ecosystem, where organizing, technical assistance, storytelling, project development, and financing reinforce one another to advance community-led resilience investments. The approach demonstrates how an ecosystem builder can strengthen implementation not by creating new direct-service infrastructure, but by investing in trusted local and regional organizations, connecting complementary capacities, and filling gaps as they emerge.

The Industrial Commons

With a $45M CHIPS-funded National Science Foundation Regional Innovation Engine award, **The Industrial Commons (TIC)** is building a sustainable textile innovation ecosystem across the Appalachian region, anchored by locally embedded research and development, cooperative business models, shared infrastructure, and shared governance.

Rather than competing for outside investment, the model organizes businesses, universities, workforce institutions, and public agencies into regional networks to jointly develop technology, commercialize innovation, expand workforce opportunities, and establish shared standards for job quality and industry participation. TIC works alongside their partners to retain intellectual property within the region through shared patents and developing governance structures that give participating businesses access to shared research, technology, and circular supply chains, creating regional assets that communities collectively steward rather than export. To date, the Engine has leveraged approximately $70M in additional resources, established producer consortia around textile circularity and hemp commercialization, secured shared patents that will generate ongoing revenue for the regional ecosystem, and developed a new statewide workforce curriculum with North Carolina's Department of Public Instruction.

TIC is also investing in physical assets to support locally rooted businesses and expand collective wealth building. In Morganton, it is transforming a 28-acre brownfield into a collaborative hub for small and mid-sized textile and furniture businesses, bringing manufacturing, business incubation, workforce training, and innovation together while lowering barriers to growth. Adjacent to the campus, TIC is developing shared-equity workforce housing that preserves long-term affordability while allowing residents to build wealth. Pairing housing with industrial development is intended to help workers remain in the community and share in the value created by regional growth.

Workforce pathways further broaden who can participate in that growth. Through programs including Work in Burke and its Industrial Sewing Program, TIC connects residents to training, apprenticeships, education, and employment in the region's industries.

Together, these investments are creating locally governed institutions, shared innovation assets, physical infrastructure, workforce pathways, and cooperative market infrastructure designed to keep the long-term value generated by public investment circulating within Appalachian communities rather than flowing to outside owners.

Conclusion

The implementation of BIL, CHIPS, and IRA is far from complete. Hundreds of billions of dollars remain to be deployed, projects continue to advance across the country, and communities are still working to translate these historic investments into lower energy costs, quality jobs, stronger local economies, and more resilient infrastructure. At the same time, changing political conditions have made implementation more difficult, increasing the importance of the civic and institutional infrastructure supporting this work.

What we know from the past three years is that implementation that both delivers tangible outcomes today and strengthens the capacity of communities to shape future opportunities depends on bringing the strength of organizers, leadership developers, and advocates together with technical experts and project developers. The place-based ecosystems—the institutions and networks that have been built in local communities, regions, and states—and the national players that support and partner with these networks are vital civic infrastructure. They have the potential to continue producing meaningful material benefits for working people. They can also continue to build and support leaders who can drive change in their communities and galvanize support for more tangible and transformative outcomes over time.

Many of these networks that have the potential to deliver transformative results are still in development and remain fragile. If support recedes now, projects that are underway are at risk of stalling or producing outcomes primarily for those who historically have received the greatest benefits, a pattern that philanthropy has been trying to break. Also at risk are the relationships, implementation expertise, new networks, and emerging leaders built through this work. The big bet that philanthropy made when these laws first passed could be lost just as communities are beginning to achieve their planned outcomes and are becoming more capable of pursuing more ambitious goals.

The most important work ahead is not simply completing remaining projects, but sustaining the systems that turn one-time public investment into a durable foundation for a more equitable, green, and democratic economy.



Photo of Randy Groff by Feliz Productions, in collaboration with RegenAll

Conclusion

Philanthropy's unique role in this work—supporting relationship building, leadership, coordination, learning, and community building—continues to be critical. Continued investment can help the place-based ecosystems and the national ones mature into permanent civic infrastructure. The **framework** at the end of this report weaves together the lessons from the capacity sections into a tool to help funders and practitioners identify gaps in the ecosystems in which they are participating.

Organizers and advocates have learned how to engage in community development projects. Community and economic developers in the public and private sectors have learned how to work strategically and collaboratively with organizers and advocates. The most important work ahead is not simply completing the projects that remain, but sustaining the implementation ecosystems that will determine whether this generation of public investment achieves one-time outcomes or creates a durable foundation for a more equitable, green, and democratic economy.

> *"While the reversal of many federal programs has altered the scale and speed of progress, the people who built the systems and relationships to deploy these projects are still here, not only driving incredible progress but re-envisioning what the future of community development and resilience could look like when we work together from the bottom up. We have seen, over and over again, networks of local and national practitioners who know how to do this work sharing their knowledge, capital, and capacity with one another and continuing to dream big about what the future of our communities might look like."*
>
> Rachel Halfaker, Milken Institute

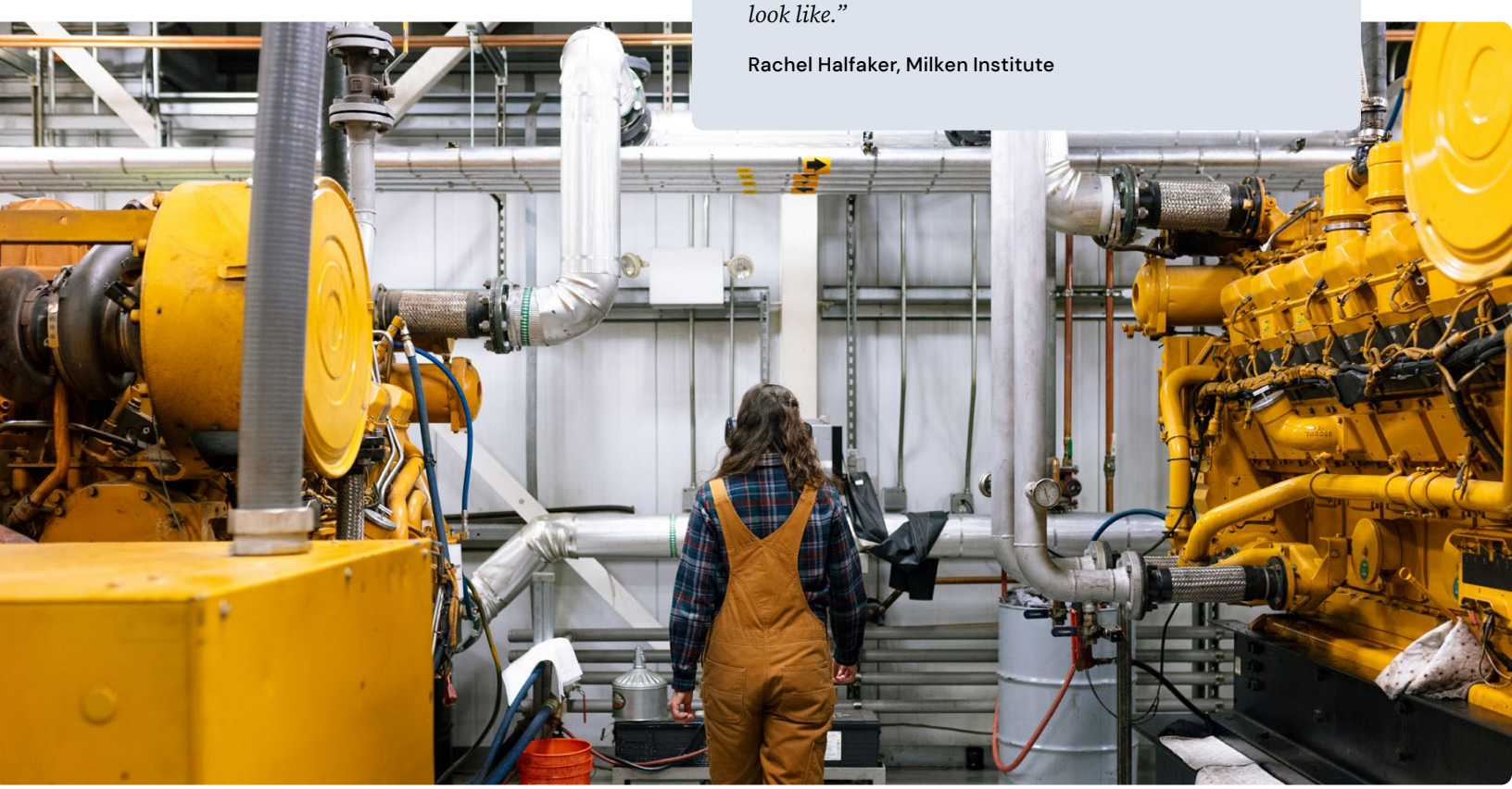


Photo of Katya Karankevich by Akela Space, in collaboration with AKPIRG and the Alaska Center

From Policy to Possibility:
A Framework for Strengthening Ecosystems to Deliver Community Benefits and Build Community Power

Designed for philanthropy, government agencies, and practitioners, this document translates the longer report's lessons into a practical framework to turn public investment into tangible community benefits, while also translating that success into greater power to shape what comes next.

The longer report and this framework draw on lessons from BuildUS, a three-year, pooled philanthropic fund created in 2023 to help leverage the landmark Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (BIL), the CHIPS and Science Act (CHIPS), and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) by investing in the community and worker capacity, networks, and engagement needed to accelerate their implementation. Our experience reinforced a central thesis of our work: equitable implementation can do two things at once—deliver tangible results for multi-racial working-class communities and strengthen their power to shape future decisions and investments. Because inequitable outcomes are often embedded in the systems and structures that shape public investment, equity requires addressing not only what gets built and who benefits, but also how those systems work and who has the power to shape them.

The framework focuses on nine interconnected implementation capacities, outlined on the following page and covered in more detail in the longer report. When these capacities are present, they help communities translate public investment into economic and climate benefits, while building power to shape future opportunities and broader change. As a *working tool*, we encourage users to adapt it based on their own knowledge, experience, and local context.

How to Use the Framework

Use this framework to identify capacity strengths and gaps in an implementation ecosystem, as well as opportunities for investment, coordination, and partnership. Assess each dimension separately, although they inherently intersect.

Assess the ecosystem, not individual organizations. No single organization is expected to hold every capacity. The key question is whether needed capacities are present, adequately resourced, connected, and accessible to the communities and projects that need them.

Consider the ecosystem's stage of development. Capacities develop over time, and may range from emerging or informal, to being actively built, to well-established and durable. The bullets under each question generally describe capacities that are relatively robust and mature; use them to surface strengths and areas for development.

Treat gaps as investment opportunities and growth areas. Missing or underdeveloped capacities can point to where additional resources, relationships, expertise, or infrastructure are needed.

Nurture and protect mature ecosystems to expand impact. Mature ecosystems still require support to sustain results, deepen community power and public legitimacy, and create opportunities for greater scale and systems change.

Use this framework at different times. Funders, public agencies, and practitioners can use the framework when entering a place or issue, developing a strategy, or revisiting an existing ecosystem as conditions change.

Recognize that policy conditions differ by place. These conditions shape what an ecosystem can assemble and accomplish; this tool largely does not assess those enabling conditions.

This framework builds on the analysis and lessons in the accompanying report, *From Policy to Possibility: Strategies and Case Studies for Building Ecosystems That Deliver Community Benefits and Build Community Power*. The key takeaways and ecosystem capacities below provide the foundation for the framework that follows. To better understand the connection points that lead to stronger outcomes for working people and communities, we encourage readers to review the full report.

Key Report Takeaways

Implementation of BIL, CHIPS, and IRA is still unfolding.

Implementation ecosystems require sustained support.

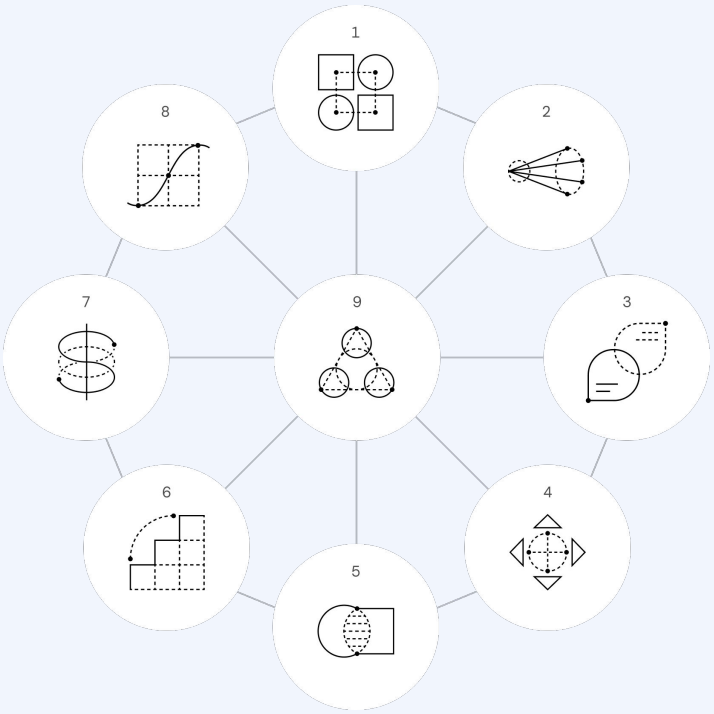
The capacities and relationships built through implementation are delivering tangible results.

Implementation that connects community power and project development expertise is vital civic infrastructure.

Ongoing public investments, including at the state and local level, create regular opportunities to flex implementation muscle.

Ecosystem Capacities

1	Organizing Infrastructure and Community Engagement
2	Advocacy
3	Communications
4	Technical Assistance, Navigation, and Project Development
5	Government–Community Partnerships
6	Workforce Development
7	Capital and Financing
8	Research and Data Tracking
9	Ecosystem Builders



1 Is the ecosystem **connected and aligned?**

- Strong working relationships across sectors and capacities that go beyond a single organizational representative.
- Written agreements between organizations or similar structures that define roles, responsibilities, decision-making, as well as accountability mechanisms.
- Dedicated coordination capacity, including an ecosystem builder[1] or intermediary, regular touchpoints, shared tools, and mechanisms for resolving problems.
- Community-government and labor-community partnerships that connect institutional authority, support cross-agency coordination, and combine implementation expertise with community and worker lived experience and knowledge.
- Shared goals and narrative alignment around what implementation is intended to accomplish, with different partners able to adapt strategies and messages for their constituencies.
- Working relationships that go beyond individual projects to enable peer learning, resource sharing, replication, and rapid access to specialized expertise.

2 Is the ecosystem **ready to deliver and communicate?**

- Full-lifecycle technical assistance and project-development capacity, from project conception and funding through implementation, operations, maintenance, and stewardship.
- Trusted navigators and community-based delivery partners that make support accessible and provide multiple entry points for communities with different levels of readiness.
- Accessible capital and financial expertise, including capital structuring, bridge and concessionary financing, shared procurement, financial modeling, and project bundling.
- Legal, regulatory, compliance, and government capacity to navigate requirements, manage risk, coordinate agencies, and move projects through public processes.
- Workforce systems anchored by organizations trusted by communities that connect workers to quality jobs and provide the recruitment, training, placement, retention, and supports needed to reach and serve diverse communities.
- Communications planned alongside implementation, including outreach mechanisms, story collection, and trusted messengers that can make tangible benefits visible.
- Shared tools and infrastructure that make delivery easier and scalable, including digital tools with human support and trusted hubs that broker expertise, relationships, capital, and replication.

1. Ecosystem builders are organizations that intentionally connect, coordinate, and strengthen the capabilities needed for successful implementation. See section nine in the longer report for more detail.

3 Is the ecosystem **representative and positioned to build power?**

- Organizing and base-building groups (e.g., labor unions, tenant unions, community organizing groups) that organize within historically disinvested communities and have leadership that is representative of and accountable to those constituencies.
- Community-labor coalition agreements or practices that support the groups in operating as co-designers, strategy partners, and decision-makers.
- Advocacy skills and access to identify consequential decision points, develop actionable proposals, and influence government and industry decisions.
- Formal mechanisms for community and worker authority in government and industry projects, such as community and worker representation on governing bodies, shared governance, and other structures that shift decision-making power.
- Mechanisms for community control over economic value, including ownership, local revenue retention, and other approaches that allow communities to capture lasting benefits from investment.
- Organized constituencies and negotiating capacity that position communities and workers to exercise leverage, negotiate concrete commitments (e.g., community benefits agreements, labor and procurement standards), and hold decision-makers accountable.
- Narrative and community storytelling capacity, so workers and residents are supported with training, coaching, editorial assistance, and agency over their stories to define what successful implementation means, communicate tangible impacts, and shape the public narrative.

4 Is the ecosystem **adaptive, learning, and publicly responsive?**

- Publicly accessible and timely implementation-related data tracking infrastructure.
- Shared measures of success along with processes for continuous feedback and learning.
- Research and evaluation designed for action, including community-informed research, real-time evaluation, and peer learning and synthesis across projects and places.
- Early-warning and defensive capacity, including legal, regulatory, funding, governance, and project-defense infrastructure that identifies internal and external risks/threats before they become crises.
- Adaptive resources and decision-making, including flexible grants, bridge funding, contingency planning, and the ability to redirect strategy as conditions change.
- Responsive communications capacity to explain changing conditions, counter misinformation, communicate setbacks, and keep communities and partners informed.
- Preservation and transfer of knowledge, including data, guidance, stories, lessons, and institutional memory that can survive organizational and political transitions.

5 Is the ecosystem **durable and publicly legitimate?**

- Capacity and relationships that persist beyond individual projects or funding cycles, rather than being rebuilt for each new opportunity.
- Successful practices that become standard ways of working; commitments embedded in budgets, policies, procurement, contracts, and governance structures that continue to be upheld.
- Community and worker gains that endure beyond individual projects, including stronger leadership and organizations, greater authority, and economic benefits that are sustained and applied to future work.
- Public visibility and understanding of tangible benefits from implementation, connected to the projects, policies, and public investments that produced them.
- Positive experiences of implementation that translate into support for continued or expanded action, reflected in increased community participation, demand for similar projects, or support for local champions.
- An ecosystem that builds on successful implementation to advance new projects, replicate effective approaches, and shape future public investments and decisions.