



Equity Pledge & Implementation Guidance for Renewable Energy Developers & Investors

**As developed by the Just Transition
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Introduction

- The Pledge is rooted in a **justice-centered framework** and grounded in **core principles that resonate with local communities.**
- It recognizes that the **scale of investments converting our nation's energy infrastructure from fossil fuels to renewable energy is unprecedented within the last century and likely for the next century.**
- The impact will be **economy-wide** and has the potential to not only address our **climate crisis** but, potentially, our society's related **health, economic and racial disparities.**
- This Pledge is a reckoning of the role of investors and developers of this new energy future and is a call to action of the major stakeholders in the clean energy sector to work towards a more **sustainable, equitable, democratic and inclusive clean energy economy.**
- The Implementation guidance immediately follows each pledge to offer a roadmap for fulfilling the Pledge.



How to Use This Guide

There are 11 Pledges in this document, broken down into Principles, Practices, Processes, and Projects.

Each Pledge is divided into 3 columns:



Myths, which pose the fictions typically perpetuated in the developer industry;



Facts, which debunk those falsehoods with truths;



For These Reasons We Commit To, which outline the Oath.

- Each Pledge is then immediately followed by the **Implementation Guidance**, which outlines how to best enact the Pledge.
- The final slide is a list of resources referenced in the document.



Myth:

- The “bottom-line” profit motive for renewable development project is the sole or primary determinant of a project’s success.
- The “business case” for social/non-energy benefits of renewable energy development project must be established.

Pledge #1: WE BELIEVE... IN THE SACREDNESS OF PEOPLE, PLACE AND PLANET OVER PROFITS

Facts:

- Renewable development projects impact the local environment, its people, and community, and requires a higher level of awareness and responsibility in project development and implementation.
- Price and profits are no longer prized over “best value” contracts. Investors want to know your ESGs (environmental, social, and governance) outcomes.
- Public sector and institutional clients want to work with socially responsible firms. It is the mantra of our climate moment, and it is the [right] thing to do.
- The concept of establishing the business case for social benefits is an oxymoron.

For these reasons we commit to:

- Establish corporate-wide equity values and principles as integral to our business ethos and corporate culture.
- Practice what we preach by building a firm and project team(s) that reflect the demographics of today’s workforce.
- Conduct an honest assessment of diversity, equity and inclusion on our current and past projects.
- Invest in continuous learning within the organization.

Pledge #1

What to do?

- Establish a corporate-wide statement of equity principles and metrics – see Resources & References page for links.
- Lead with purpose at the C-Suite level and throughout the firm. Engage your entire corporation in values formulation and articulating their application in the company's operations and projects.
- Live your values. Assess every decision through the values screen. Only work with firms and individuals who share and agree.
- Articulate DEI qualifications and values statement and consistently collect data to support and refine these statements.
- Develop a diversity plan for your proposed project(s), with verifiable percentage goals specifying the type and total dollar value awarded to historically underutilized populations and business by business category and trade.



Myth:

- Diversity and inclusion entail charitable, social and political objectives and are irrelevant to our organizational competitiveness or project outcomes.

Pledge #2: WE BELIEVE... DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION REQUIRE INTENTIONAL & CONTINUOUS EFFORT & OUR ORGANIZATION WILL LEAD BY EXAMPLE

Facts:

- Organizations that expand and diversify their networks to include Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) and women improve performance, including:
 - improved innovation,
 - outperforming their competitors by 35%,
 - attracting more business from clients with diverse backgrounds
- Public, private and institutional Investors are increasingly demanding verifiable demonstration of socially responsible business practices, a history of diversity, equity and inclusion, and projects that deliver social, energy and non-energy community benefits.
- Values statements are good, but an organization's track record is more convincing and is increasingly information requested in RFPs.

For these reasons we commit to:

- Establish corporate-wide equity values and principles as integral to our business ethos and corporate culture.
- Practice what we preach by building a firm and project team(s) that reflect the demographics of today's workforce.
- Conduct an honest assessment of diversity, equity and inclusion on our current and past projects.
- Invest in continuous learning within the organization.

Pledge #2

What to do?

- Conduct an honest assessment of diversity, equity and inclusion on our current and past projects.
- Invest in continuously learning within the organization.
- Articulate DEI qualifications and values statement and consistently collect data to support and refine these statements.
- Develop a diversity plan for your proposed project(s), with verifiable percentage goals specifying the type and total dollar value awarded to historically underutilized populations and business by business category and trade.
- Increase your firm's diversity at the professional and management levels to bring innovation and cultural competence to your technical work and projects.
- Hire and support a diversity, equity and inclusion specialist to eliminate tokenism, and consistently search for opportunities to grow better.
- Create a safe, welcoming, and supportive work environment for your underrepresented personnel.
- Proactively invest in building a pipeline of diverse professionals and contractors through internships, apprenticeships, mentorships, and other ways of opening up channels of opportunities.
- Develop strategies to eliminate barriers and constraints that may restrict historically underutilized businesses from contracting and subcontracting, including access to capital, bonding, insurance.



Myth:

- Land values are defined by its highest and best use.

Pledge #3:

WE RESPECT AND HONOR... THE CULTURAL, SOCIAL & HISTORICAL VALUES OF THE LAND & COMMUNITIES IN WHICH WE WORK

Facts:

- Renewable development is inherently an extractive process. It harvests/extracts energy from the sun and wind to energize human endeavors, but the process can often be mindless of and extractive of immeasurable land values rooted in generations of community building.
- The development process will unearth, extract and change the local history, the character of the local community, as well as the lives, memories and sense of meaning and belonging of its residents.
- Disrespecting or disregarding the current and past cultural, social, political and economic landscape of a community may impair your reputation and compromise your project. It will determine how successfully you can move your project forward and what kind of help or harm you are bringing with you.
- Doing homework – not on just the deal but on the people and the community – helps to have more meaningful conversations with the community, design a more effective project, and get the needed buy-in.

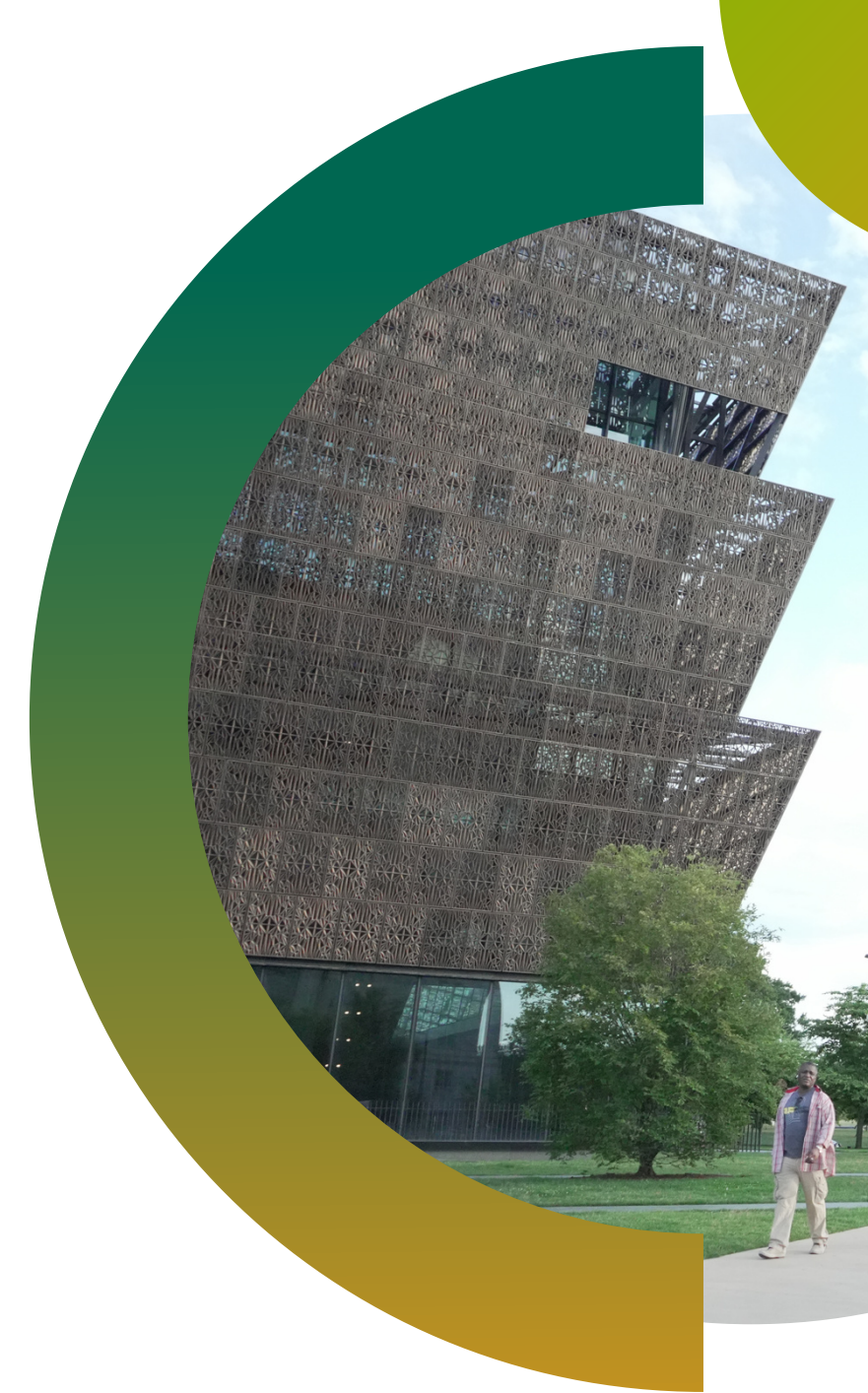
For these reasons we commit to:

- Incorporate the 100-year history of the community into the design and development process, including demographics, socio-economic changes, and tenure, history of segregation, divestment, gentrification, and extraction.
- Assess the potential collateral damage/harm the project might create.

Pledge #3:

What to do?

- Search for and talk to the 'oldest' member(s) of the city/community to bring historical perspective on the land, the people, the politics, the economy and your project.
- Take into account existing community plans (not just city plans, but community-generated plans).
- Conduct your own research on the history of the community and identify the pain points.
- Take a listening tour of neighborhood associations to better understand their history, wants, needs and assets, including youth and working families.
- Find existing coalitions of community organizations to leverage their wisdom and experience.
- Be prepared for the truth telling; listening time is not time to get defensive or hurt.
- Know that there is a solution to every challenge.



Myth:

- Elected officials represent the will and voice of the community and will deliver the project.

Pledge #4:

WE BELIEVE... COMMUNITY-WIDE ENGAGEMENT IN PROJECT DESIGN, DEVELOPMENT & IMPLEMENTATION PRODUCES THE BEST PROJECT OUTCOMES

Facts:

- Elected officials are not always the best barometer for community sentiments when it comes to development. Too often elected officials' community concerns/interests are skewed by the cost of elections.
- There is no one "community voice". While legislators are often the clients and otherwise critical project champions, they represent one voice - one perspective - to a community-wide approach to a clean energy project.
- A "one-stop shop" solution (ala elected officials) suboptimizes the buy-in and benefits that your project might offer. The community should be involved from the beginning and throughout the process.
- Community dissent in the absence of broad-based community buy-in will stop project.

For these reasons we commit to:

- Creating relationships and partnerships with formal and informal community leaders to provide the opportunity for all residents and groups to participate to prevent the marginalization of segments of the population.
- Making special efforts to hear the voices of low-income and communities of color.

Pledge #4:

What to do?

- Evaluate how well the electeds are perceived within the community by researching their background and political history.
- Ask electeds for names of key community leaders to meet with.
- Ensure electeds that your community outreach is part of your corporate values and will help in the design.
- Develop an asset map/inventory of community organizations and other neighborhood organizations that are doing good work.
- Conduct community expert surveys and community focus groups for input on ways to ensure maximum community ideas and feedback.
- Engage a community organizer (maybe more depending on geography, language and interests that you must traverse) to survey residents/local coalitions and facilitate their participation in meaningful visioning, planning process.
- Let people know who you are and why you're there through community meetings, newspaper articles, op eds, radio, social media, etc.
- Solicit feedback and advice from a broad section of people in the community, and follow it.



Myth:

- Everything has a price and getting 'buy-in' requires a checkbook and good PR campaign.

Pledge #5:

WE WILL ...

UPHOLD HIGH STANDARDS OF INTEGRITY AND EFFICACY

Facts:

- A checkbook approach to community buy-in will not work. Buying off one or two elected officials or community leaders does not assure community-wide support.
- It is a false solution to go into a community, spread around a few favors, pick your friends, and raise them up as your community representatives. It might seem like an efficient strategy, but this approach is sure to backfire and the backlash will take a lot of time and money to correct.
- Communities know this trick. Communities may want your solar project but will kill it if they distrust you (the developer) and the process. Trust and transparency are the most important currency you can offer a community. Make trust building and truth telling a centerpiece of your predevelopment work.

For these reasons we commit to:

- Investing in community outreach and engagement vs. marketing and public relations.
- Openness and transparency regarding the project and throughout the development process.

Pledge #5:

What to do?

- Budget time and money for authentic community engagement.
- Develop a community governance structure for two-way communication and to provide a structured role and strategy for community input.
- Hold open community meetings, listen to what people want, share your ideas about what you'd like to do, listen again, and create a project plan that puts the community's goals and values front and center.



Myth:

- Effective community engagement will slow down the project.

Pledge #6:

WE REJECT... URGENCY & EXPEDIENCY AS THE SOLE OPERATING STANDARD FOR PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

Facts:

- Community engagement processes take no more time than the real estate pre-development process and is integral to the overall development process.
- Community engagement process can live alongside/ run parallel to the 18 mos-2 years that goes into the project's predevelopment work – from project concept, to land acquisition, financing, permitting, team building.
- An effective community engagement process will assuredly be better for the project, investors, the community and the city.

For these reasons we commit to:

- Provide an adequate runway (time frame) to effectively engage community residents as part of our project plan.
- Allocate the necessary resources into my development budget to adequately support the community planning and engagement process.
- Establishing the necessary structure/culture/expectations so that the staff doing community engagement can effectively provide insight to and have leverage with the other development staff or decision makers.

Pledge #6:

What to do?

- Establish a community engagement workplan as an integral component of your predevelopment work.
- Organize monthly information meetings for updates and inputs from community. Seeking community input after the project is already baked is a recipe for disaster and distrust.
- Identify staff with culture competence and expertise to serve as community liaison and put them on the advance team for project development?
- Schedule meetings to maximize community participation. Allow ample time for meeting scheduling (more than 1 week!). Respect that organizations and individuals have existing projects, priorities, and schedules they must attend to.
- Demonstrate respect for their time.
- Hold meetings at a time and place that is accessible for working families. Offer child care, translation and food/snacks for evening or weekend meetings.



Pledge #6:

What to do Cont'd

- Build durable relationships (not transactional).
- Seek feedback on your timeline and how it aligns with other projects, workforce initiatives, environmental initiatives, and other relevant existing and previous local happenings.
- Make time to listen not just to share your project and vision. Be ready for some meetings to not get to your intended outcome. All parties involved may need additional time. Make space for that.



Pledge #7:

WE VIEW...

THE COMMUNITY AS AN ASSET IN DESIGNING & IMPLEMENTING AN EFFECTIVE RENEWABLE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Facts:

- The community is an asset. They bring social, political and even financial capital to the project.
- The frontline experience, ideas and recommendations – in essence, the expertise of community residents are not ‘heard’, ‘not believed’, ‘not used’ and ‘not paid’ even when sought after.
- Community residents and organizations are problem solvers, evidencing resilience from intergenerational knowledge of problems and ways to fix them.
- Community residents are political; they can move politicians– they vote for them.
- The community is resource rich; every community has a network of community organizations experienced in workforce development, small business assistance, community development, community organizing, and community service delivery.
- The community has social capital and can be the echo chamber or drummers for clean energy.
- If the community trusts and respects the developer and values the goal of the project, they will be swayed by a legitimate process to make the necessary trade-offs to find meaningful solutions to get the job done.
- Outside ‘experts’ are brought in, paid well for their experience providing formulaic technical and financial renewable development solutions. But unfortunately, the standardized solutions fall short of the unique design solutions to meet community needs and opportunities.

For these reasons we commit to:

- Identifying and utilizing the unique assets of our community.
- Valuing and compensating community expertise and not undervaluing community expertise while overvaluing outside expertise.

Myth:

- Community is an obstacle to getting the project done. It is a problem to avoid.
- Technical expertise of professional consultants are more important than the social, political and community knowledge and expertise of local residents.
- Only trained and well-paid professionals have development expertise with the best ideas/solutions.

Pledge #7: What to do?

- Establishing a community budget to compensate residents for assistance in planning, organizing, marketing, development and other roles.
- Consider ways to adjust our business model to reflect a more.
- fair and respectful division of the economic value of a solar project, acknowledging the economic value of the community contributions.
- Identify staff with most capacity to listen and build strong community relationships?
- Do not helicopter into communities with 'solutions'.



Pledge #7:

What to do Cont'd

- Do not sell your ideas.
- Pursue plans that have widespread support.
- Implement the ideas that the community is interested in order to more likely to save time and money on permitting, regulatory compliance, staffing, output sales and more.
- Be transparent about the economic value of the project and fairly assign benefits.
- Consider people who live in a community sovereign over their community. Move with respect, as if you are in their home. Listen. Make requests. Take 'No' for an answer.



Myth:

- Renewable developers are solely deal makers and not civic actors with agency to “do good and well”.

Pledge #8:

WE BELIEVE...

IN THE INTERSECTIONAL VALUE OF THE RENEWABLE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS & THAT OUR WORK CAN BE A CATALYST FOR ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL, & ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Facts:

- There are winners and losers in every new project and initiative. Your job is to include this in your calculus and the project design in order to create win-win situations, and to minimize the damage.
- Our energy infrastructure impacts our natural and built environments, our climate, our economy, our health, our communities.
- The benefits of clean energy go beyond climate mitigation and can address issues of society’s most vulnerable communities, including large disparities in health, income, wealth, as well as household energy burdens and budgets, jobs, business opportunities, and more.
- The multiple benefits of a renewable energy project must and can be designed up front, especially with community input and benefits in mind.

For these reasons

we commit to:

- An “equity first” standard for our project plans.
- Focusing on the intersectional – multi vs. uni-dimensional – impact of the project.
- Maximizing community-wide (energy and non-energy) benefits of our project(s).
- Advancing long-term, transformative outcome (vs. short-term transactional benefits – like computers for residents)?
- Use the purchasing power and political capital of our project (s) to make a difference in the local policy environment to benefit the most vulnerable communities.

Pledge #8:

What to do?

- Ask and actively listen to the community about what they need. Community leaders are the holders of solutions in their community, but they may not have the resources to implement them.
- Avoid false solutions--accounting fictions like off-site RECs, especially unbundled RECs and deliver real local clean energy solutions to directly reduce the community carbon footprints and other local and regional pollution.
- Structure projects to decrease the energy burdens of local residents and increase the benefits for the community.
- Create financial instruments and opportunities such as equity shares and community investment funds for residents to build community wealth.
- Revitalize blighted and abandoned properties into community-serving green space or create new green space and agricultural lands.
- Create ownership, workforce and business opportunities for local residents.



Pledge #8:

What to do Cont'd

Ask ourselves:

- What are the effects of our project on the physical and natural environments beyond climate? Look at the landscape – community, people, local resources/supports and more – surrounding your project. How will they benefit? What will they lose?
- What are the economic impacts on the local community? Look at the landscape– community, people, local resources/supports and more – surrounding your project. How will they benefit? What will they lose?
- What are the health consequences? Be specific.
- Can I design the project to do more? Demonstrate a full range of energy and non-energy benefits.
- Use environmental screens to assess the intersectional harms/benefits of the selected projects/sites, such as CalEnviro Screen or EPA's Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping Tool.
- Incorporate a multidimensional value proposition discussion and screening process in the project planning phase.
- Choose scale and technology wisely for delivering intersectional benefits.
- Incorporate non-energy benefits and consequences in the entire project design – start mapping out multidimensional value propositions in the project planning phase. Consider the project from a 360-degree perspective, looking at all sides. If you start this process in the project planning phase, it will be much easier to deliver on multi-dimensional value propositions and outcomes.

Myth:

- Renewable energy development is harmless.

Pledge #9:

**DO NOT ...
USE CLEAN ENERGY SOLUTIONS TO
PERPETUATE OTHER
ECOLOGICAL/CLIMATE HARMS**

Facts:

- Utility-scale renewables can create enormous collateral damage. Solar farms, for example, can take large swatches of land undermining the natural capital of the eco-system, including farmlands, forests and overall biodiversity.
- Purchasing off-site renewable energy credits can degrade and otherwise destroy biodiversity of other lands/countries.

For these reasons we commit to:

- Assessing the environmental impacts of the development on the local environment.
- Mitigating major environmental consequences or finding alternative development options.
- Seeking and respecting community input on land development strategies.

Pledge #9:

What to do?

- Ask and actively listen to the community about what they need. Community leaders are the holders of solutions in their community, but they may not have the resources to implement them.
- Avoid false solutions--accounting fictions like off-site RECs, especially unbundled RECs and deliver real local clean energy solutions to directly reduce the community carbon footprints and other local and regional pollution.
- Structure projects to decrease the energy burdens of local residents and increase the benefits for the community.
- Create financial instruments and opportunities such as equity shares and community investment funds for residents to build community wealth.
- Revitalize blighted and abandoned properties into community-serving green space or create new green space and agricultural lands.
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- Create ownership, workforce and business opportunities for local residents.



Myth:

- The economic calculus for the client/investor is limited to the cost of the project (Low cost bid).
- It is impossible or difficult to find qualified workers and contractors in the local market.

Pledge #10:

WE WILL... MAXIMIZE HIGH ROAD JOBS & BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES THAT PAY LIVABLE WAGES, OFFER CAREER OPTIONS & INCLUSIVE OF LOCAL WORKERS & CONTRACTORS

Facts:

- Investors, institutional and public sector clients are increasingly concerned about the economic multiplier of their investments, including local tax benefits, jobs and business opportunities that will stay within the community.
- Job quality, along with job creation and job access (local jobs) are increasingly important measures of project viability.
- The “green economy” is one of the fastest emerging sectors in the U.S. economy, outpacing the fossil fuel industry in job creation.
- Income and wealth disparities will be exacerbated without an intentional focus on providing education, training, and access to jobs and business opportunities for underrepresented populations.
- There is a labor shortage in the architecture, engineering, and construction sector(s) (AEC), which comprises over 2/3 of jobs.

For these reasons we commit to:

- Diversifying and localizing our supply chain.
- Designing the work to maximize local jobs, new and existing locally-owned businesses, and opportunities for community wealth creation.
- Investing in workforce education and training in the clean energy sector for underrepresented populations.
- Supporting prevailing/family and union wages on the projects.

Pledge #10:

What to do?

Business Development:

- Right size the development project to increase opportunities for smaller and minority and/or women-owned businesses.
- Develop a business utilization plan/strategy.
- Work with public and community-based business and economic development organizations to identify the local business community. Encourage/support existing businesses to provide goods and services.
- Create the conditions necessary to support new businesses.
- Identify and connect with:
 - Local business associations
 - The relevant local businesses that you can involve on your project
 - Local business assistance organizations that can help you find and support local and diverse businesses.
 - Local city/county/state/federal electeds.
- Leverage, where appropriate, public, private, and philanthropic collaborations and partnerships.



Pledge #10:

What to do Cont'd

Workforce Development:

- Support and strengthen existing workforce training programs so that residents may take advantage of employment opportunities that development brings.
- Connect with local business associations neighborhood associations, environmental justice organizations, and local solar installers and developers, or nonprofitsolar developers who can connect you to the local community– (Examples: GRID Alternatives, Solar United Neighbors, Solstice, WeSolar, and Peoples' Solar Energy Fund).
- Connect, where appropriate, with local Conservation Corps and environmental and social justice community-based organizations.
- Connect with local, city/county/state/federal workforce investment boards and organizations.
- With all connections made, be sure to listen and learn about their existing projects, goals, and initiatives. Consider and discuss the alignment and opportunities of the project you're planning.
- Be willing to adjust your timeline to align with local workforce initiative opportunities.
- Make sure there is contract language that assures all the workers on your project are paid a living wage or better .

Myth:

- You need wealth to build wealth.
- Investors are required to maximize their returns.
- It's ethical to extract natural resources and labor at the lowest cost possible, externalizing costs as much as possible.

Pledge #11:

WE UPHOLD... THE VALUE OF RENEWABLE DEVELOPMENT IN COMMUNITY WEALTH CREATION

Facts:

- The economic benefits of our current energy monopoly largely accrue to utility shareholders and not community stakeholders, sub optimizing the potential of addressing wealth disparities in low-income and BIPOC communities.
- Distributive energy technologies create a unique opportunity to put production value of clean energy and its wealth creation potential in the hands of the consumer.
- Innovative models of community investments and equity participation exist.

For these reasons we commit to:

- Designing and implementing business models that share the economic benefits of solar /renewables with the community.
- Shifting solar ownership, power and control to EJ communities.

Pledge #11:

What to do?

- Allow/ encourage communities to become equity investors in their own solar projects.
- Partner with local communities so that they can develop locally-designed and controlled energy systems.
- Step aside from customary credit requirements for customers and community- based developers.
- Create business structures that ensure EJ communities can successfully own and control their own solar resources, create jobs, reduce the energy burden, and have profits to reinvest in their communities.
- Finance solar projects with community partners that result in community ownership within 5-6 years.
- Provide grants to community organizations to allow them to build their capacity to engage in job creation, MBE and WBE development, solar project development, solar financing, energy co-op development and/or municipal utility or tribal utility development.



Resources & References

[The Just Transition PowerForce](#)

[The National Utilities Diversity Council](#)

[LEED social equity goals](#)

[Equity and Buildings: A Practical Framework for Local Government Decision Makers](#)

[NAACP Guidelines for Equitable Community Involvement in Building & Development Projects and Policies](#)

[Emerald Cities Collaborative High-Road Resources](#)

[Energy Democracy Scorecard](#)

[EcoDistricts Urban Sustainability resource library](#)

[Jemez Principles of Democratic Organizing](#)

[CalEnviro Screen](#)

[EPA's Environmental Justice Screening Tool](#)

[EnerWealth](#)

[GRID Alternatives](#)

[Solar United Neighbors](#)

[Solstice](#)

[WeSolar](#)

[Peoples' Solar Energy Fund](#)

[Co-op Power](#)