

# Renewable Energy Policy Initiative

September 2019



## State and Local Energy Justice Programs

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The United States has started an energy transition toward low-carbon energy resources. This transition has the potential to generate important benefits such as improved environmental conditions, and new innovation and economic development opportunities. However, this transition may also have serious implications for vulnerable populations, particularly low-income communities, communities of color, and communities that rely heavily on employment in legacy energy industries (e.g., coal mining communities), among others. Research to date reveals that, especially on the so-called “frontlines” of the energy transition, communities are already facing the adverse consequences of the energy transition. In some places, the economic foundation of the region has completely dissolved, such as in some coal mining regions in Appalachia. In other places, households struggle to pay for energy services as prices rise, and are forced to make difficult decisions such as whether to reallocate funds from other essential goods such as food or medicine. In addition to these adverse impacts, many are not able to seize the benefits of the energy transition, such as having access to clean, efficient, and advanced technologies. These trends raise the question of what programs, policies, and organizations exist across the country that can address local sources of vulnerability? What implementation pathways exist for these programs and policies to aide communities during the energy transition?

This policy brief introduces an inventory of 185 energy justice programs, policies, or organizations at the national, state, and local level in the United States. We identified these programs through an extensive search of social media, organizational and government websites, and winners of energy justice-related grants. For those regions that appeared to have a smaller online presence, we contacted individuals directly that we could identify as working on transition issues. Although we cannot claim this list to be comprehensive, it at least provides a useful sample from which to draw preliminary observations.

### Preliminary Findings

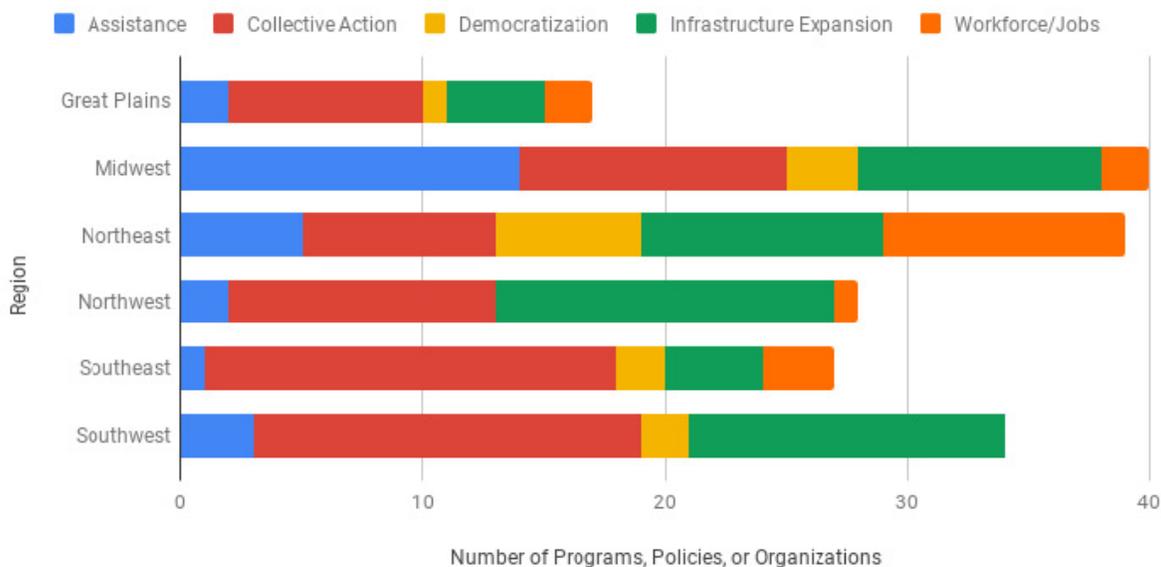
Of all energy justice programs that we documented, approximately 56% of them are state efforts or programs that offer services across a state’s territory. Sub-state initiatives account for 22% of the total. The remaining programs are regional or multi-state (16%) and national (6%). *Figure 1* identifies and defines the five different types of justice programs we identified across the country: assistance, collective action, democratization, infrastructure expansion, and workforce/jobs.

**Figure 1**  
Energy Justice Program Categories and Definitions

Assistance	Collective Action	Democratization	Infrastructure Expansion	Workforce/ Jobs
Seeks to improve energy affordability and extend access to energy technologies and services. Most focus on providing support to low-income utility customers through direct bill assistance, upgrade assistance, and legal advocacy and support.	Seeks to educate community members and facilitate shifts in power. Most focus on community education, awareness, and action for energy transition, a “just” economic transition, energy and climate justice, and more equitable climate and energy policy.	Seeks to expand participation in decision-making processes and ownership of energy programs and infrastructure. Most focus on under-represented groups or local empowerment.	Seeks to build new renewable infrastructure or energy efficiency upgrades, and specifically to extend the access and benefits of renewable and energy efficiency infrastructure to low-income and other marginalized groups.	Seeks to support workforce training, development, and regional economic transition, especially in communities that have lost energy industries, such as coal mining or production.

Figure 2 provides a count of programs by region and Figure 3 gives a count by state. Figure 2 demonstrates that collective action programs are the most common and democratization the least. The Great Plains have the fewest programs, or at least the fewest with a public presence. The Midwest hosts the greatest number of assistance programs. Workforce and jobs training programs are primarily concentrated in the Northeast and Southwest, which both account for Appalachian regions. Figure 3 shows that California and Washington have the greatest number of programs, followed by Kentucky, Oregon, Montana, Missouri, and Minnesota.

**Figure 2**  
Policies, Programs, and Organizations by Type and Region, 2019



**Figure 3**  
Number of Policies, Programs, and Organizations by State, 2019

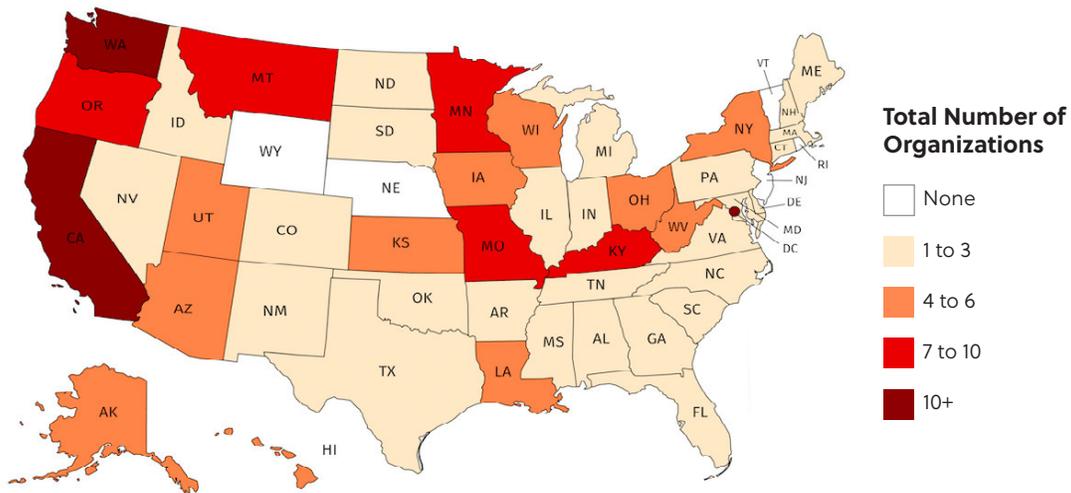
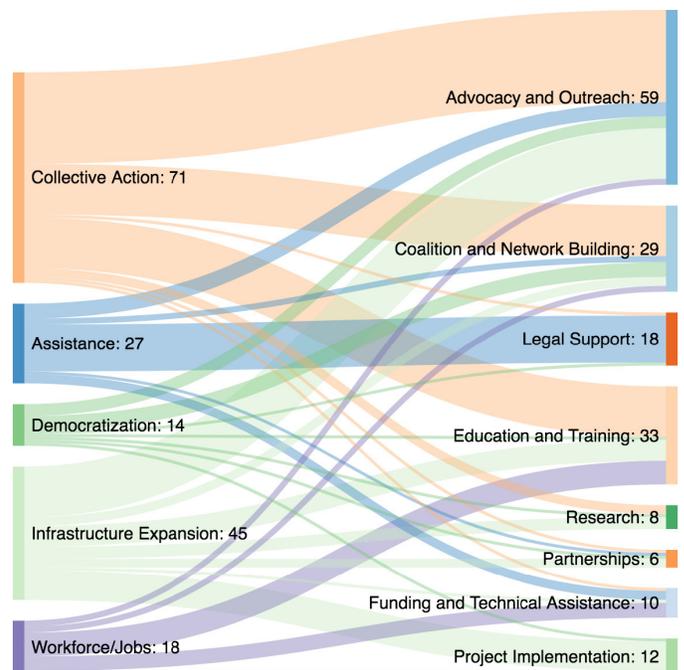


Figure 1 above summarizes the foci of U.S. energy justice programs but does not reveal the pathway through which they address issues of justice or are implemented. In Figure 4 below, we connect all program types (left axis) with their pathways (right axis). This figure demonstrates that advocacy and outreach actions are most common, followed by education and training, and coalition and network building. Collective action and infrastructure expansion programs most commonly provide advocacy and outreach; and assistance programs most commonly provide legal services.

**Figure 4**  
Energy Justice Program Types (left axis) and their Pathways (right axis)



## Acknowledgements

Support for this research was provided by the Ford School Renewable Energy Support Fund.