

FACT SHEET

EVERYONE WINS: STATE-LEVEL PROGRAMS CAN SPUR LOCAL CLEAN ENERGY ACTION

Statewide programs that provide assistance to local communities to ramp up clean energy initiatives can be an effective way to increase the deployment of renewable energy, energy efficiency, and clean transportation options that decrease greenhouse gas emissions and provide a multitude of other benefits.

Through such initiatives, states can support local action with the provision of:

- Technical support, which gives localities many of the tools they need to adopt and implement policies and programs
- Recognition for participants and multi-jurisdictional participation that fosters healthy competition and peer-to-peer learning
- Financial incentives, in certain cases, to facilitate capital and other investments

This fact sheet provides an overview of state-level programs that are focused on spurring local communities to take action on clean energy: what they are, how they work, and how they can serve as an important tool for policymakers seeking to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.¹

WHAT IS DRIVING INCREASED INTEREST IN STATE-LOCAL CLEAN ENERGY PROGRAMS?

States, cities, and towns are stepping forward in greater numbers to make climate and clean energy policy commitments, particularly in light of the active undermining of climate initiatives at the federal level by the Trump administration. Indeed, over 400 mayors representing 70 million Americans have signed on to the Climate Mayors network, a group committed to upholding the Paris Agreement goals.² However, many communities do not have the technical expertise, staff, or resources to achieve their climate goals and/or pursue various clean energy opportunities on their own. State programs targeting local communities can fill this resource gap and enable the achievement of state climate goals, which is even more important now in the absence of federal leadership.

STATE-LOCAL CLEAN ENERGY PROGRAM GOALS:

- Reduce statewide greenhouse gas emissions to help achieve state and local climate and clean energy targets
- Support local communities in a pragmatic, cost-effective manner to enhance local capacity on designing and implementing clean energy policies, programs, and projects
- Build stakeholder support and continued engagement for clean energy actions

WHY ARE LOCAL COMMUNITIES SO IMPORTANT?

- Cities account for almost 70 percent of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions.³
- Local jurisdictions are the gateways to the implementation of policies and projects supporting clean energy adoption.
 - Local regulations can catalyze (or impede) the implementation of renewable energy like wind and solar, energy efficiency measures, and clean transportation.
 - Local communities have jurisdiction over zoning codes and building energy code enforcement and can often adopt elements that are more stringent than what exists at the state level.
 - Local communities can implement or pilot clean energy initiatives and are often open to exploring innovative options to advance policy goals.

BENEFITS OF STATE-LOCAL CLEAN ENERGY PROGRAMS

There are myriad benefits from such collaboration for both the state and local communities.

State benefits:

- Helps the state move closer to its climate and clean energy goals
- Provides economies of scale for programmatic investment
- Shares climate and environmental program experience and expertise with local governments, thus creating a longer-lasting impact beyond any one state administration
- Builds local support for state policies
- Helps spur economic development around the state

Local community benefits:

- Provides access to additional technical support and financial incentives
- Better enables communities to achieve local climate and clean energy goals, relative to independent efforts alone
- Offers access to shared best practices and advice from other policymakers across the state
- Spurs new investment in clean energy projects, which can bring new, good local jobs

SEVERAL MODELS OF STATE-LOCAL CLEAN ENERGY PROGRAMS EXIST

There are a number of state-level programs that encourage and support communities to take action on clean energy. These initiatives are sometimes spearheaded by a state government agency, often an environment-focused one, but can also be led by a nonprofit organization or other entity.

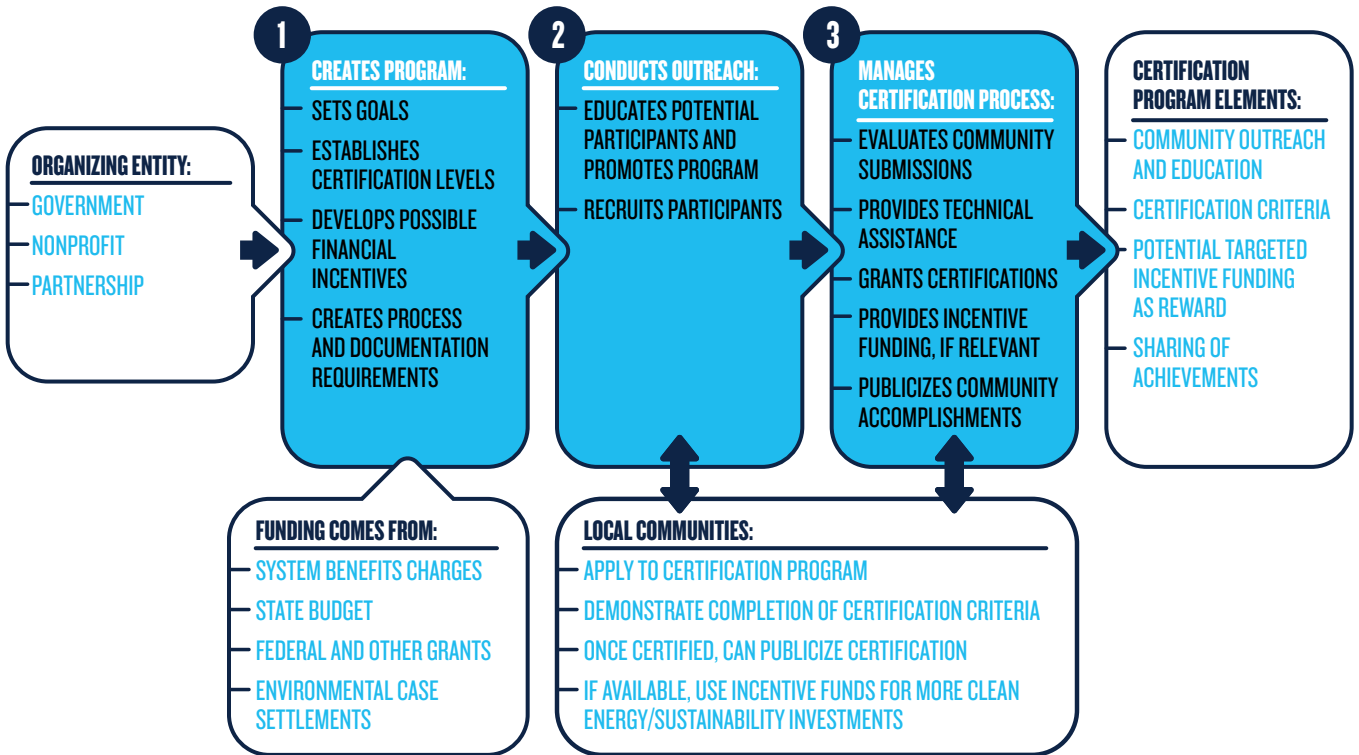
The two most common program models, which are depicted on the following page, are:

1. A certification program, which requires the completion of certain action items by participating communities and which may open access to incentive funding for additional clean energy investments
 - Actions typically include advanced energy efficiency projects, renewable energy investments, programs to advance electric vehicles and/or smart planning efforts that target municipal operations or enable community-wide adoption of such clean energy initiatives
2. A collaborative information-sharing program, which offers best practices and encourages voluntary participation by communities
 - No mandatory actions need to be implemented for participation
 - Grant funding is typically not available to community participants

SPOTLIGHT ON NEW YORK'S CLEAN ENERGY COMMUNITIES PROGRAM

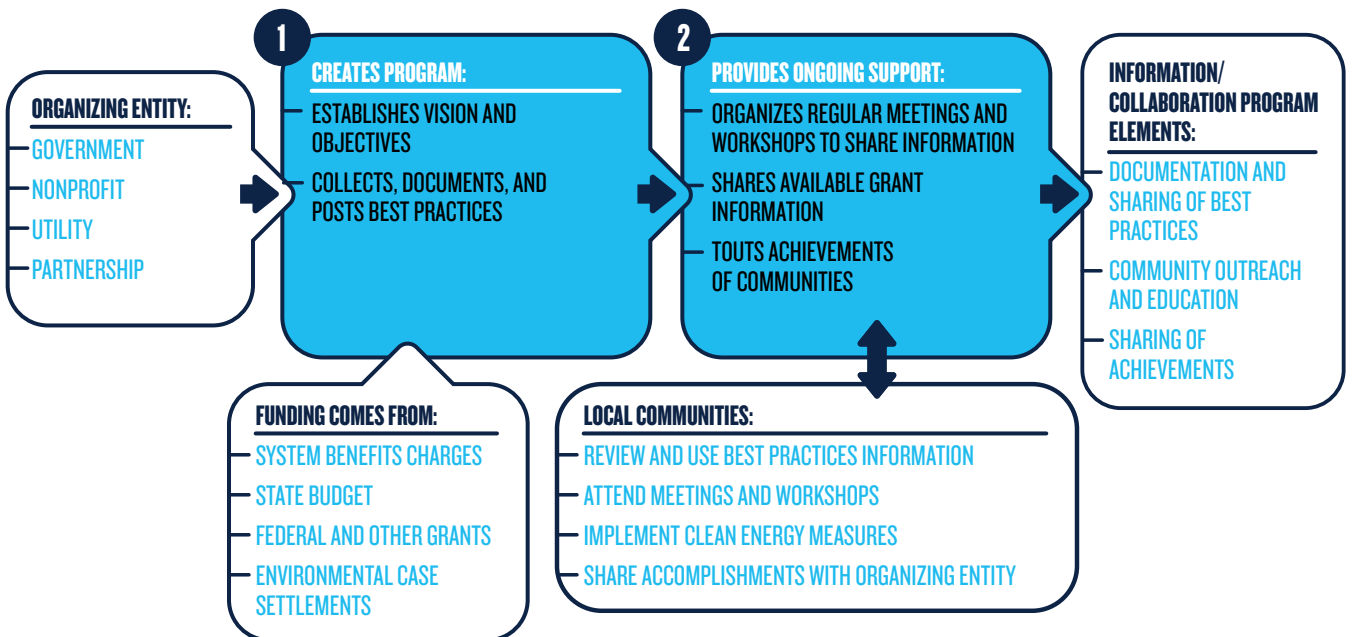
- Launched in August 2016
- Administered by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA)
- Communities must complete four out of ten “high-impact action items” to earn certification and access to grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$250,000
- High-impact action items include:
 - building energy benchmarking
 - code enforcement training
 - streamlining of solar permitting
 - implementing a solarize campaign
 - clean energy upgrades for municipal buildings
 - conversion of streetlights to LED technology
 - deployment of electric vehicles and/or charging stations
 - certification as a Climate Smart Community⁴
 - implementing a Clean Energy Community Choice Aggregation program⁵
 - implementing a commercial PACE financing program⁶
- Grants received must be used for additional clean energy initiatives
- As of May 2019:
 - 552 communities are participating in the program; 273 of those have been certified as Clean Energy Communities
 - 1,573 high-impact actions have been completed⁷
 - More than 85 percent of New York State’s population lives in a community that has completed at least one high-impact action item
- The program is funded through a surcharge on customer energy bills dedicated to energy efficiency and renewable energy projects and through Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative auction proceeds

CERTIFICATION PROGRAM MODEL



Examples include: Sustainable Jersey, MA Green Communities, NY Clean Energy Communities

COLLABORATIVE INFORMATION-SHARING PROGRAM MODEL



Examples include: CA Sustainability Alliance, Minnesota Greenstep Cities, Sustainable Maine

BROAD ARRAY OF STATE-LEVEL PROGRAMS THAT ENCOURAGE LOCAL CLEAN ENERGY ACTION

There are numerous states with some type of program to encourage local action on clean energy. Some programs focus exclusively on that issue, while others have a broader sustainability focus and include other topics, such as recycling, cleaner transportation, and smart planning.

The degree of ambition varies by program, with some attempting to encourage cutting-edge clean energy efforts and others helping local communities explore more entry-level policies and programs. Below are examples of such state-local programs.

State	Name	Administering Entity	Model Type	Incentives Offered	Website
California	California Sustainability Alliance*	Nonprofit	Information sharing	No	https://sustainca.org
California	Green Cities California*	Nonprofit	Information sharing	No	http://www.greencitiescalifornia.org
Connecticut	Sustainable Connecticut*†	Nonprofit	Certification	No	https://sustainablect.org
Florida	Florida Green Building Coalition Green Local Government Standard*	Nonprofit	Certification	No	http://floridagreenbuilding.org/local-governments
Iowa	Iowa Green Streets*	State government	Economic development‡	Yes	https://www.iowaeconomicdevelopment.com/green
Maine	Sustainable Maine*	Nonprofit	Information sharing	Yes	https://www.nrcm.org/projects/sustainability
Maryland	Sustainable Maryland*	University, local government association	Certification	Yes	http://sustainablemaryland.com
Massachusetts	Green Communities	State government	Certification	Yes	https://www.mass.gov/guides/becoming-a-designated-green-community
Michigan	Michigan Green Communities*	State government, local government associations	Information sharing	No	http://migreencommunities.com
Minnesota	Minnesota Greenstep Cities*	State government, local government association, nonprofits	Information sharing	No	https://greenstep.pca.state.mn.us
New Jersey	Sustainable Jersey*	Nonprofit, university	Certification	Yes	http://www.sustainablejersey.com
New York	Clean Energy Communities	State government	Certification	Yes	https://www.nyscrda.ny.gov/All-Programs/Programs/Clean-Energy-Communities
New York	Climate Smart Communities*	State government	Certification	No	https://climatesmart.ny.gov/about
Pennsylvania	Sustainable Pennsylvania*	Nonprofit, local government association	Certification	Yes	http://www.sustainablepacommunitycertification.org
Tennessee Valley Authority service territory	Valley Sustainable Communities*	Utility	Certification	No	https://www.tva.gov/Economic-Development/Engage/Valley-Sustainable-Communities
Vermont	VECAN (Vermont Energy & Climate Action Network)*	Nonprofit partnership	Information sharing	No	https://vecan.net
Virginia	Go Green Virginia*	Local government association	Certification	No	http://www.gogreenva.org
Wisconsin	Legacy Communities*	Nonprofit partnership	Certification	Yes	http://greentiercommunities.org

*Includes other sustainability efforts in addition to clean energy.

† Sustainable Connecticut is an independently funded, voluntary certification program that has replaced the state- and utility-managed Clean Energy Communities program.

‡ In the Iowa Green Streets program, economic development dollars are used as incentives to integrate priority clean energy and broader sustainability actions into economic development projects.

EXAMPLES OF SUCCESS FROM STATE-LOCAL CLEAN ENERGY PROGRAMS

Sustainable Jersey (2009–present) is a voluntary sustainability certification program run by a nonprofit and funded through government, corporate, and foundation grants, events, and program sponsorship:

- 79 percent of New Jersey's 565 towns participate in Sustainable Jersey and 89 percent of the state's population lives in a registered or certified community.
- Participants have successfully implemented and documented more than 9,000 sustainability actions, such as tracking and reducing energy use, installing electric vehicle charging stations, and developing community gardens.
- Sustainable Jersey has provided more than \$4.9 million in grants to towns, school districts, and schools for local projects that create healthy and sustainable communities in the state.⁸

The Green Communities Program is an initiative run by the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources, focused on providing grants, technical assistance, and local support to help municipalities reduce energy use and costs by implementing clean energy projects in municipal buildings, facilities, and schools:⁹

- At 240 Green Communities, participation in the program has steadily grown from its launch in 2008 to include more than two-thirds of municipalities in the state and over 78 percent of the population.
- The Green Communities Program has provided over \$100 million in grants to municipalities for energy efficiency and other clean energy projects.
- Participating Green Communities reduced their energy consumption by 11 percent, or 1.1 TBtus, in 2017.

CONCLUSION

State-level programs that encourage local clean energy action are an effective way to help cities, towns, and counties implement measures to reduce energy consumption, increase the deployment of renewable energy resources, and promote clean transportation solutions. These programs can decrease greenhouse gas pollution and help states and local communities achieve climate

and clean energy goals, such as meeting the emissions-reduction targets in the Paris Accord. There are various models for states to follow in developing such programs. Deciding which approach to take depends on several factors, including the existing clean energy framework and the entities that may exist within a given state to administer such an initiative.

ENDNOTES

1 These programs are distinguished from other important state-level and utility programs that may also provide local governments with specific clean energy assistance, but that are not primarily “community-focused” and don't necessarily include programmatic elements (such as certification, sharing of best practices, etc.) similar to the programs highlighted herein.

2 <https://www.bloomberg.org/blog/fulfilling-americas-pledge-climate-mayors-20-leading-cities-new-partnerships-lead-americas-electric-transportation-future> (accessed May 14, 2019).

3 World Bank, *Cities and Climate: An Urgent Agenda*, World Bank, December 2010.

4 For more information about the Climate Smart Communities program, see New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, “A Guide to Local Action,” <https://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/50845.html> (accessed May 14, 2019).

5 For more information about Community Choice Aggregation, see New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, “Community Choice Aggregation,” <https://www.nysrerda.ny.gov/All-Programs/Programs/Clean-Energy-Communities/Clean-Energy-Communities-Program-High-Impact-Action-Toolkits/Community-Choice-Aggregation> (accessed May 14, 2019).

6 For more information about PACE financing, see New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, “Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) Financing Guidelines,” <https://www.nysrerda.ny.gov/All-Programs/Programs/Commercial-Property-Assessed-Clean-Energy> (accessed May 14, 2019).

7 <https://www.nysrerda.ny.gov/All-Programs/Programs/Clean-Energy-Communities/CEC-Map> (accessed May 24, 2019).

8 Sustainable Jersey 2019 infographic provided by Sustainable Jersey on February 11, 2019.

9 Email from Dan Burgess, MA DOER Deputy Commissioner and Chief of Staff, February 7, 2019.