U.S. DEPARTMENT OF
ENERGY

Secretary of Energy Advisory Board

Recommendations on Tribal and Community Benefits

Presented to the Secretary of Energy on October 16, 2024

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Department of Energy ("DOE") is committed to ensuring that the benefits of the nation's energy transition reach all communities, particularly those historically underserved and those that may be left behind by shifts in policy and technology. As the United States advances towards a clean energy future, the opportunities created by investments in energy infrastructure, technology, and workforce must be distributed equitably across all geographies and communities, from urban centers to rural and Tribal lands. The shift to new lower-carbon energy projects and programs is not just an environmental issue—it is fundamentally one of economic growth, energy security, and community resilience.

The Secretary of Energy Advisory Board ("SEAB") established the Tribal and Community Benefits Working Group ("TCBWG") to support the DOE in its goal of ensuring the benefits of historic federal clean energy investments reach communities across the U.S. These investments are driven by landmark bipartisan legislation such as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act ("IIJA") of 2021 and the Inflation Reduction Act ("IRA") of 2022, both of which are designed to enhance energy security, create good-paying jobs, and improve the quality of life for all Americans.

The TCBWG's efforts focus on two key objectives, laid out in the initial group charter:

> **Objective 1**: Embed equity and economic opportunity across DOE's policies and programs through the continuous development and implementation of equity action plans, Tribal energy programs, and workforce strategies.
>
> **Objective 2**: Advance a place-based approach to equitable clean energy transition for those workers and communities involved in specific DOE-funded projects, through continuous and steadfast commitment to the Department-wide Community Benefits Plan ("CBP") framework[1] and other complementary approaches.

Through an inclusive approach, the TCBWG has engaged a wide range of stakeholders, from offices and national labs across the DOE complex to local communities, Tribal leaders, consultants to these groups, and other stakeholders. These efforts include providing the technical and economic support necessary for communities to fully participate in the new energy economy.

The transition to clean energy represents not only a national imperative, but also an opportunity to strengthen America's energy and economic independence, create family-supporting jobs, and revitalize local economies--all while strengthening relationships and trust between the DOE and its labs, and those benefitting from the department's programs. By ensuring that these benefits are widely shared, the DOE is helping to build a future where all Americans, regardless of geography or background, can thrive in a rapidly evolving energy landscape.

[1] This framework was added to many DOE grant and loan proposal evaluation processes under the IIJA and IRA and includes four (4) core policy priorities – investing in America's workforce; meaningfully engaging communities and labor; advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility; and advancing the goals of Justice 40.

METHODOLOGY

To support the research, the TCBWG pursued the following approach:

- **Project Summary** – Devised and socialized with the SEAB a 3-page working group charter, which explained the background, role of the TCBWG, timeline, audience for recommendations, and working group membership.
- **Identification and Scheduling of Interviewees** – Collaboratively created a list of priority interviews that were held from April through September of 2024. Special attention was placed on the following:
  - Those within the DOE overseeing the community, workforce, and Tribal engagement work,
  - Those within DOE implementing programs that require direct attention to community and worker benefits, and
  - Tribal, labor, and community leaders on the ground working to ensure benefits are realized as these projects move forward.[2,3]
- **Information Resources** – Established an online document repository, shared across working group members and the SEAB support staff based at the DOE, including interviewee transcripts created through an AI note-taking program.
- **AI Resources** – Fed information from interviews into an AI model, which was used to facilitate the drafting of the report and other project tasks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The TCBWG recommendations are grouped into three main tracks identified through interviews and discussion among team members. They were further refined into either **immediate actions**, which can be implemented by December 31, 2024, or **long-term actions**, which are intended for benefit and implementation during the next administration, from January 2025 to December 2028. These recommendations aim to improve energy development outcomes while ensuring that communities and Tribal nations are active process participants.

TRACK 1: EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES AND ACCESS WITHIN AND ACROSS DOE PROGRAMS

Overview:

With the passage of the IIJA, the DOE went through a profound shift from an agency mostly focused on research, science, and technical feasibility to one focused on all these things plus major project development and implementation. This shift requires the agency to engage directly

[2] Participating in the DOE Communities Local Energy Action Plan ("Communities LEAP") program, including Adjuntas, PR (i.e., hydropower and microgrids), Bridgeport, CT (i.e., manufacturing), Columbia River, OR (i.e., DR and storage), Eklutna, AK (i.e., hydropower and microgrids), Hennepin County, MN (i.e., zero emission transportation), Jackson County, IL (i.e., community solar), Kern County, CA (i.e., carbon management), Logan County, WV (i.e., mining), Questa, NM (i.e., green hydrogen), and Stockton, CA (i.e., CCS and microgrids)

[3] Energy Foundation, Environmental Protection Network, Hopi Utilities Corporation, Navajo Minerals Department, Reimagine Appalachia, Southern Ute, Steptoe & Johnson, Tohono O'odham Utility Authority, and UC Berkeley (CLEE)

with companies, communities, workers, Tribes, and other place-based stakeholders in new and creative ways.

As the DOE advances efforts to modernize the energy sector, it is crucial to ensure that these projects will truly benefit the places in which they are developed—including places that have historically faced barriers in accessing federal programs. These include rural areas, Tribal nations, and economically disadvantaged regions that are often on the front lines of energy transitions. The goal is to provide these communities with the tools and resources they need to actively participate in the clean energy economy, while building and strengthening trust between and across all stakeholder groups.

While some DOE offices and partners at the national labs have successfully risen to the challenge of expanding access to funding and providing technical assistance, there are still significant gaps in how these opportunities are communicated and delivered across the country. This inconsistency can create challenges for communities that are eager to contribute to and benefit from the nation's energy future.

In particular, the DOE has faced challenges in moving from an agency made up of separate technical offices focused on specific energy technologies, to a more unified organization recognizing the interplay of technologies and programs as these benefits are realized on the ground. Under the refocused objectives, all offices (including the labs) would work more collaboratively, allowing DOE to better respond to an energy transition that requires a range of technology and program approaches, working together to respond to the specific needs of communities and regions, and supported by multiple types of infrastructure and workforce investments.

Findings:

- **Inconsistent Implementation of Program Support Across DOE Offices –** Some DOE offices and labs have taken proactive steps to ensure that communities facing economic challenges have access to funding and resources. However, the extent to which this is happening varies across the department. In general, those programs that have been doing place-based projects for years[4] are generally more systematic and immersed in their approaches to community engagement. Other newer offices have had less experience in these types of programs, and may struggle to support communities in taking full advantage of available investments.

- **Challenges in Accessing DOE Funding and Resources –** Under-served communities, particularly Tribal nations, low-income urban communities, and rural areas, often face difficulties navigating the complex application processes required for federal energy

[4] EERE (Office of Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy), EM (Office of Environmental Management), and IE (Office of Indian Energy Policy and Programs) programs are examples of offices that have experience running place-based programs.

programs.[5] Limited access to technical assistance and a lack of clear guidance makes it challenging for these communities to compete for funding, resulting in missed opportunities to implement energy projects. In addition, current program structures often require multiple applications to different technology offices for different pieces of the same project, making the process even more cumbersome to navigate.

- **Need for a More Consistent Approach to Expanding Opportunities** – While there have been efforts to increase outreach and support, currently there is a lack of a standardized DOE system for ensuring that all offices prioritize expanding opportunities to underserved communities. Without a consistent approach, it is challenging to ensure that these efforts are being implemented effectively across the DOE. While the recent creation of the Office of Community Engagement is an attempt to address this issue, it brings a new set of activities and priorities to DOE, and may need more time and resources to mature. Furthermore, other offices and programs need to simultaneously prioritize and institutionalize their equity-based community engagement efforts.

Short- and Long-Term Recommendations:

1. **Optimize or Create Regional Support Hubs** – To provide more localized support, the DOE should consider tapping into the resources of the Office of Community Engagement, which recently assigned personnel to field locations. Ideally, these regional field offices could be expanded into DOE regional hubs (co-located with the national labs where appropriate) with dedicated staff focused on helping communities navigate federal programs.

   These hubs would serve as centers for technical assistance, offering tailored support based on the specific needs of the regions they serve. A regional structure—something other agencies already support--more easily responds to the reality that the energy transition is inherently place-based, and requires a range of technology and programmatic approaches. Applied resources could ensure that regions across the country can benefit from energy projects that create economic opportunities and enhance local energy resilience. Moving toward a set of program offices that reflect the fundamentally integrated nature of the energy transition will require new tools for cross-program collaboration, as well as investments in staff with skills that go beyond the traditional science and engineering backgrounds.

   - **Immediate Action**: **Create Regional Support Teams** – Establish and fund regional support teams, co-located with the national labs or other federal agency regional offices where appropriate, to provide direct, localized assistance to communities seeking to engage with federal energy programs. Funding would potentially be through overhead from projects teams across DOE, combined with

[5] For example, Tribal communities face additional barriers in accessing the Low-Income Communities Bonus Credit Program within the Investment Tax Credit ("ITC") adder within the IRA, as unused capacity from projects on Indian lands can be reallocated, reducing their ability to participate in these critical funding opportunities.

national labs discretionary funds.[6] These cross-program, cross-technology resources could be modeled after the interagency coal community "Rapid Response Teams."[7] They would focus on helping communities access technical expertise from multiple DOE offices and ensure that these communities are fully equipped to compete for federal resources. In the short term, if executed through new hubs, this work could be substantively integrated into the existing Office of Community Engagement with additional funding.

- **Long-Term Action**: **Re-establish DOE Regional Offices –** Where appropriate, expand its regional support teams into permanent hubs or components into the Office of Community Engagement. Either way, the assigned resources will work in close coordination and potentially co-located with the national labs and/or other federal agency regional offices. These hubs would be portals to DOE funding and processes that within regions will work across programs and technologies. These hubs would serve as ongoing resources for technical expertise, grant assistance, and workforce development in underserved areas. They would also provide communities, local governments, Tribes, and other stakeholders with a way to relate to and communicate with DOE as an agency, working across multiple related issues areas, rather than with individual technical offices. Ideally funding for this effort would come through Congressional appropriation, but could also be gathered as overhead across programs, and/or through national lab discretionary funds.

2. **Establish Clear Guidelines for Expanding Opportunities Across DOE Programs –** Develop and implement clear, consistent guidelines to ensure that every office prioritizes making federal energy programs more accessible to under-served communities. This would involve offering training and resources to staff across the department to ensure that all programs work towards the common goal of widening access to funding and support. This approach will help ensure that underserved communities—whether urban, rural, or Tribal—can more easily access the resources they need to grow and thrive.

   - **Immediate Action**: **Establish Clear Guidelines for Program Access –** Issue standardized guidelines that ensure all offices prioritize making federal energy programs accessible to under-served communities, including more isolated rural and Tribal communities. These guidelines should include steps to simplify application processes and ensure equal access to resources. Programs should ideally also include Community Benefits Plans ("CBPs") to help engage communities on specific projects where appropriate (e.g., large 'steel in the ground' project investments), but not be confined solely to CBPs as tools for community engagement.

3. **Enhance Technical Assistance and Outreach to Underserved Communities –** Expand technical assistance programs to support communities that face challenges in accessing

[6] Laboratory Directed Research and Development ("LDRD")
[7] Now part of the Interagency Working Group on Coal and Power Plant Communities

funding opportunities. This could include offering workshops on grant writing, providing one-on-one or small working group support throughout the application process, elevating best practice suggestions for managing grants, and increasing outreach efforts to raise awareness about available programs. By offering more hands-on assistance, the DOE can ensure that more communities can participate in energy projects that create jobs and drive local economic growth.

- **Immediate Action**: **Launch Technical Assistance Workshops –** Develop partnerships with the national labs, cross-program communication professionals, external affairs teams; and philanthropic entities. These partnerships would sponsor a series of workshops to assist communities in navigating federal energy programs, including tax credits and adders.[8] The in-person and virtual workshops should focus on helping rural, Tribal, and economically disadvantaged areas to more fully participate in federal funding opportunities.

  ***NOTE**: This could be a potential project of the new DOE Foundation for Energy Security and Innovation ("FESI"), given its cross-program, cross-technology, pro-community focus.*

- **Long-Term Action**: **Expand Grant Programs for Local Projects –** Expand grant programs to support community-led energy initiatives that do not fit neatly into one technical office, with a focus on projects that reflect local priorities. Increased cross-programmatic funding will allow under-served communities, including isolated rural and Tribal areas—to more equitably take advantage of clean energy opportunities.

  Communities LEAP and the Clean Energy 2 Communities program are examples of this type of place-based cross-technology program approach. Important to this effort will be including stakeholders who have place-based knowledge. This will ensure important aspects of culture and values are planned for, incorporated throughout the projects, and at the conclusion achieved. These types of place-based programs could be coordinated through the regional offices mentioned above.

4. **Improve Data Collection and Reporting for Program Effectiveness –** Strengthen data collection efforts, while avoiding cumbersome data requests of communities, to better track how resources are being distributed and ensure that programs are effectively reaching underserved areas. This would allow the department to evaluate the impact of its initiatives and make improvements where necessary. With better data, the DOE can more effectively direct its resources, ensuring that every community has a fair opportunity to take part in the energy transition.

[8] Section 48 investment tax credit; Low-Income Communities Bonus Credit Program; Tribal communities within Category 2

- **Long-Term Action**: **Create a National Database for Program Participation that Supports Interagency Collaboration** - Working with state and local governments, as well as tribal communities, expand partners that establish a comprehensive database that tracks the distribution of federal energy resources to communities across the country.

    a) Include clear mapping of actual project implementation versus just a focus on a developer's headquarters.
    b) In collaborating with the Department of Treasury, ensure that tribal-specific allocations under the Low-Income Communities Bonus Credit Program are protected and carried over to guarantee equitable access for tribes and increased investment in future cycles.
    c) Identify specific benefits from collaborations between the DOE and Treasury, including annual tax credit receipts from the IRA. The analysis needs to be by state and preferably by region, including Tribal lands and communities that have been historically underserved. This will help ensure that funding is equitably distributed by highlighting areas where further support may be needed.

- **Long-Term Action**: **AI-Based Tools for Equity –** Charge the national labs with developing and implementing AI-powered data analytics platforms to monitor and visualize the distribution of DOE program benefits across Tribal and disadvantaged communities. These tools should specifically track the distribution of benefits across different communities, identifying gaps in equity, and providing real-time feedback on the outcomes of DOE programs for Tribal and disadvantaged communities.

- **Long-Term Action**: **AI for Climate Resilience –** Expand AI research and development at the national labs focused on climate resilience, ensuring that predictive models are available to mitigate environmental risks faced by Tribal and vulnerable communities. Risks include, but are not limited to, extreme weather events, environmental degradation, and energy insecurity. These tools should be incorporated into the DOE's broader clean energy and sustainability initiatives.

TRACK 2: IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMUNITY BENEFIT PLANS

Overview:
The DOE's CBP framework is designed to ensure that federally funded energy projects provide tangible, lasting benefits to the communities in which they are located. The goal of these plans is to involve local communities in project development, ensuring that economic, environmental, and social benefits are shared broadly. While the framework offers a solid foundation, there are opportunities to enhance the way it is put in place to better meet the needs of diverse regions across the country.

Findings:

- **Limited Early Community Involvement in Project Planning –** Many CBPs are developed without sufficient input from the local communities that will be impacted. Too often, key decisions are made before meaningful engagement takes place. Communities may also lack the knowledge to inform and assess the quality of a CBP. This can result in missed opportunities to address local concerns and priorities.

- **Inadequate Accountability and Feedback Mechanisms –** There is a lack of consistent data collection and feedback mechanisms to track the success of CBPs. Without a clear process for monitoring outcomes, it is difficult to assess whether projects are meeting their intended goals. Importantly, timely information is also necessary for stakeholders to make necessary adjustments during project implementation.

- **Inconsistent Execution of CBPs Across Projects –** The quality and effectiveness of CBPs vary significantly across different projects. Some projects are closely aligned with community needs and have strong plans in place, while others struggle with execution due to limited resources or guidance.

Short and Long-Term Recommendations:

1. **Encourage Early and Meaningful Community Engagement** - Ensure that communities are involved early in the planning stages of energy projects.

    - **Immediate Action**: **Communicate Expectations of Developers on Community Engagement** - Clearly state to developers the expectation that they engage with local stakeholders such as community leaders, residents, and other area organizations in the early planning stage, throughout the applicable phases, and as all major milestones are completed. Further make it an imperative for their projects to reflect local needs and deliver benefits that matter most to the community. Early and consistent engagement will also help create and sustain an environment of trust between developers and the communities involved. This will lead to more successful project outcomes.

2. **Invest in contract negotiators to speed and professionalize CBP implementation** – Currently CBPs are negotiated as part of the standard contract process, by contract officers with important procurement expertise. This expertise is critical to the long-term success of the projects, but the contract process would benefit immensely from including expert deal negotiators to ensure promises made in the application – including in the community benefits plans submitted by applicants – are meaningfully integrated into project contracts.

    - **Immediate Action**: **Invest in contract negotiators to speed and professionalize CBP implementation** – There should be—at a minimum —a short-term commitment to hire a qualified set of deal liaisons with complex negotiation

experience. These individuals, ideally assigned by region, will make the CBP process and overall projects more locally relevant and less susceptible to litigation or other risks. The deal professionals will also ensure CBP accountabilities are integrated into project agreements and that their completion is consistently tracked over time.

3. **Improve Monitoring and Reporting of Project Outcomes** – Develop a standardized approach to monitoring and reporting on the outcomes of CBPs. Establishing clear guidelines for data collection will allow for better tracking of how well projects are delivering benefits. With improved reporting, communities and developers will be able to adjust plans, as needed, to ensure that the goals of the project are being met and that benefits are being distributed fairly.

    - **Immediate Action**: **Standardize Data Collection on CBP Outcomes** – Implement a standardized, public, and transparent process for collecting and reporting data on CBPs by the end of 2024—including publicizing these plans once grant or loan funding is secured and the CBP is fully negotiated. This will allow for better tracking of project impacts and outcomes, ensuring that benefits are distributed as intended, and will allow affected companies and communities to provide another layer of accountability as they ensure promised outcomes are realized.

    - **Immediate Action**: **Bring AI Tools to Tracking and Reporting on CBPs** – Work with the national labs to integrate AI tools to automate and standardize the tracking of CBP outcomes, providing transparent reporting and feedback to both DOE and the public. These platforms could monitor compliance with CBP agreements and use predictive analytics to assess the long-term socio-economic impacts of DOE projects. AI systems could also suggest optimizations to CBPs based on historical data and stakeholder feedback, ensuring that benefits are effectively delivered to the most vulnerable communities.

    - **Long-Term Action**: **Develop a National Framework for Enforceable CBPs** – Create a standardized framework for CBPs, supported by expert negotiators who prioritize creating public, enforceable agreements. These agreements will hold developers accountable for commitments to local communities, such as job creation, economic investments, and environmental protections.

      NOTE: *Mechanisms could include project labor agreements ("PLAs")[9] or other helpful tools.*

      Specific to workforce improvements, aligned CBPs and PLAs should also include expectations for:

[9] PLAs are pre-hire collective bargaining agreements that establish the terms and conditions of employment for a specific construction project. These agreements could be immensely helpful by being aligned to CPBs such as community goals, accountability mechanisms, and requirements for community engagement.

a) *Collaborating with local contractors and other organizations;*
b) *Ensuring area residents gain the necessary skills to compete for jobs created by the project, and*
c) *Creating opportunities for training and apprentice programs that lead to short- and long- term career benefits*

4. **Provide Greater Support for Communities to Engage in CBP Development** – Expand technical assistance to help under-served communities—including those in rural or Tribal areas—participate fully in the CBP process. This could involve providing resources and expertise to help communities engage in negotiations, understand project impacts, and advocate effectively for their priorities. By equipping communities with the tools they need to effectively participate (e.g., access to national labs, Artificial Intelligence ("AI"), Natural Language Processing ("NLP")), the DOE can ensure that CBPs deliver meaningful and lasting benefits to all stakeholders.

    - **Long-Term Action**: **Enhance Capacity Building for Community Leaders** – Expand the DOE's capacity-building efforts, offering training and resources to community leaders. This will empower local leaders to better advocate for their communities, ensuring that energy projects deliver meaningful and lasting benefits. This work could be a core function of the assigned offices, given the importance of training being done locally, as well as with regional sensitivity and trust. Training could also be coordinated and co-funded with other federal agencies that have more robust community engagement teams and relationships.

      NOTE: *This recommendation, as well as the one to create regional offices, may benefit from either treating community engagement as "overhead" for existing programs, or obtaining a direct Congressional appropriation.*

5. **Promote Best Practices Through Knowledge Sharing** – Create opportunities for knowledge sharing among communities, developers, and other stakeholders involved in CBP development. This could include regular forums, workshops, or an online platform to share best practices and lessons learned from past projects. By encouraging collaboration and the exchange of ideas, the DOE can help ensure that successful strategies are replicated, improving the overall effectiveness of CBPs across the country.

    - **Immediate Action**: **Host Knowledge Sharing Forums** – As early as possible, facilitate a series of knowledge-sharing forums such as Communities of Practice and DOE working groups that bring together project developers, community leaders, and stakeholders with direct experience in the CBP negotiation and resolution process. These forums would help improve consistency in CBP implementation and spread successful strategies across different regions, while building trust between the DOE and the communities it is benefitting. By starting consultations at the planning stage, developers can better align projects with the needs and priorities of the people they serve.

NOTE: *This could be a potential project of the new DOE Foundation for Energy Security and Innovation ("FESI"), given its cross-program, cross-technology, pro-community focus.*

- **Long-Term Action**: **Build an Online Repository for Best Practices** – Maintain an online repository where communities and developers can access case studies and best practices—organized by project size and type—from successful CBP implementations. This resource will help ensure that lessons learned from past projects are applied to future initiatives.

  NOTE: *An example of a key lesson to be shared would be the "Missouri Rule" where a set percentage of total project costs of 0.5% is set aside to support community benefit initiatives like workforce development and pre-apprenticeship programs.*

6. **Clarify Guidelines for Enforceable Agreements** – Provide clear guidance on how CBPs can include enforceable agreements that hold developers accountable for delivering on their commitments.

   - **Long-Term: Focus on Enforceability –** Ensure agreements include provisions such as local hiring, economic investment, or environmental protection. Specificity and clarity—for example, letters of credit from developers are needed to give communities confidence that the promises made during the planning stages will be honored throughout the life of the project.

TRACK 3: TRIBAL CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Overview:
Effective consultation and engagement with Tribal nations is essential to the success of energy projects that involve or impact Tribal lands. Tribal nations bring unique perspectives and expertise in land management, natural resources, and cultural preservation, which can greatly enhance project outcomes. However, current consultation practices vary across the DOE and its projects, leading to challenges in consistency, trust, and meaningful collaboration. Strengthening these processes will help ensure that energy projects benefit both Tribal nations and the broader public while respecting the rights and interests of Tribal communities.

Findings:

- **Inconsistent Consultation Practices** – The approach to consulting with Tribal nations differs significantly across DOE offices and projects. While some consultations are thorough and collaborative, others occur late in the project timeline, limiting the community's ability to negotiate and achieved the needed outcomes. This inconsistency can lead to missed opportunities for cooperation and can erode trust between DOE and Tribal communities.

- **Reduce Barriers to Respectfully Incorporating Tribal and Other Cultural Knowledge –** Tribal nations often hold valuable traditional knowledge related to land use, environmental management, and resource stewardship. However, integrating this knowledge into project planning and decision-making has proven difficult due to the lack of understanding of Traditional Ecological Knowledge ("TEK").[10] Additionally, ignoring requests for privacy around data that is culturally sensitive can limit the potential benefits that could arise from collaboration.

- **Limited Focus on Long-Term Partnerships** – Consultations are often focused on individual projects, rather than fostering long-term partnerships. This short-term approach can prevent the development of deeper, more productive relationships with Tribal nations, which are key to the success of future projects.

Short and Long-Term Recommendations:

1. **Establish Consistent and Early Exchange Consultation Practices Across DOE** – Adopt a standardized approach to consulting with Tribal nations, ensuring that engagement begins early in the project planning process, and is reciprocal. This approach should promote open dialogue and ensure that Tribal leaders have a meaningful role in shaping project decisions from the outset. For example, DOE staff should be able to participate in internships with tribal communities, and vice versa. This perhaps could happen through the Clean Energy Corps, to further strengthen and build trust between the DOE and the tribal community. Clear and consistent engagement practices will create a more transparent and collaborative environment, allowing energy projects to better reflect the priorities and concerns of Tribal nations.

    - **Immediate Action**: **Strengthen and Standardize Tribal Consultation** - Invest in staff positions that bring lived experience and direct expertise working with Tribal communities, ensuring culturally informed, respectful, and impactful collaboration. Ensure that all offices adhere to standardized guidelines for engaging with Tribal nations. These guidelines should emphasize early, meaningful consultation, allowing Tribal communities to participate fully in decision-making processes from the outset. Ideally the consultation process would include stakeholders with inherent knowledge of the community's culture and values; these stakeholders could help outside parties better understand how to expect, take in and return feedback.

    - **Long-Term Action**: **Create a Permanent Office for Tribal Consultation** – Establish and fund a permanent office dedicated to Tribal consultation and engagement. This office would provide the technical and financial assistance resources needed to ensure that consultations are consistent, respectful, and

[10] Traditional Ecological Knowledge, also called by other names including Indigenous Knowledge or Native Science, refers to the evolving knowledge acquired by indigenous and local peoples over hundreds or thousands of years through direct contact with the environment

productive across all energy projects that involve Tribal lands or interests. This office's director could have a parallel appointment as Senior Advisor to the Secretary to help coordinate the efforts of local individuals who are serving as cultural liaisons.

- **Long-Term Action**: **Use AI to Enhance Tribal Engagement**– Work with the national labs and philanthropy to utilize natural language processing ("NLP") and predictive engagement models to enhance communication and consultation with Tribal nations and communities. The primary goal will be to ensure inclusive and responsive engagement processes. NLP can analyze large volumes of feedback gathered during consultations, categorizing key concerns, and identifying recurring themes. AI models can also recommend tailored engagement strategies based on community-specific data. Additionally, AI can help the DOE and its labs prioritize engagement efforts by predicting which communities are most affected by specific energy policies and projects.

2. **Build Long-Term Partnerships with Tribal Nations** - Beyond individual projects, invest in building long-term, collaborative relationships with Tribal nations. This can be achieved through regular communication, partnership agreements, and ongoing support for Tribal involvement in energy development. Long-term partnerships can lead to more successful and sustainable projects, fostering trust and cooperation that benefit both Tribal nations and DOE's energy goals.

   - **Immediate Action**: **Establish Working Group Partnerships with Tribal Nations** – To continue to strengthen communication and knowledge sharing between the DOE and Tribal nations. Short-term focus can be on offices or program areas that do not currently have working groups. These collaborations can be an effective way to foster communications between Tribal stakeholders and decision makers and implementers in DOE.

   - **Long-Term Action**: **Establish Long-Term Partnerships with Tribal Nations** - To continue to strengthen and build trust between the DOE and tribal communities, formalize long-term partnership agreements (e.g., MOUs) with Tribal nations. These partnerships will ensure ongoing collaboration, allowing Tribal nations to play an active role in shaping energy development and policy over time. For a more centralized and consistent engagement, this agreement would ideally exist at the Secretary level to ensure it holds across all programs and offices and be supported at the permanent "Tribal Consultation" office recommended above.

3. **Provide Resources for Effective Tribal Engagement** – Offer additional resources and training to support both DOE staff and Tribal governments in the consultation process. This could include toolkits for navigating federal processes, technical assistance for project participation, and dedicated personnel to facilitate engagement. By ensuring that

all parties are well-equipped for consultations, DOE can help Tribal nations engage more fully and ensure that projects reflect their interests and needs.

- **Immediate Action**: **Offer Training Programs for DOE Staff** – Implement regular training programs for DOE staff to enhance their understanding of Tribal consultation processes, including a training as part of the regular DOE onboarding process. This will equip DOE personnel with the tools they need to engage effectively and respectfully with Tribal nations.

4. **Enhance Transparency and Accountability** – Ensure that the results of Tribal consultations are documented and publicly shared, demonstrating how Tribal input has influenced project decisions. This transparency will help build confidence in the consultation process and ensure that commitments made during engagement are honored. Greater accountability will strengthen relationships with Tribal nations and provide a clear record of how DOE projects are shaped by community input.

5. **Create Pathways for Integrating Knowledge –** Work with Tribal nations to develop frameworks that respectfully incorporates TEK into project planning. This could include designating roles for Tribal knowledge holders on project teams and providing training for DOE staff to better understand the cultural and environmental insights that Tribal communities can offer. Incorporating tribal knowledge can enhance project sustainability and ensure that development respects both the land and the cultural heritage of the communities involved. This could potentially be housed in the Office of Science given that office's "Biological and Environmental Research" program, which focuses on fundamental research related to environmental systems, including ecology. Its primary goal is to understand and mitigate environmental impacts related to energy production and usage. This often involves studying ecosystems, climate change, and bioremediation processes.

   - **Immediate Action**: **Create Pathways for Integrating Tribal Knowledge –** Develop clear mechanisms for integrating Tribal and other cultural knowledge into energy project planning and execution. This would ensure that Tribal expertise is incorporated in a way that benefits both projects and the communities they impact. Include the protection of Tribal nation's culturally sensitive information.

   - **Long-Term Action**: **Incorporate Cultural and Other Values-Based Knowledge into National Energy Strategy –** Work with Tribal nations to integrate cultural knowledge into energy planning processes funded through DOE's programs, and into national energy strategies as these are developed. This will help ensure that energy development is culturally appropriate and sustainable, benefiting Tribal and other communities, as well as the broader public.