



Energy equity: Everyone deserves access to clean energy and energy efficiency

By Ben Nathan

January 25, 2022

Utilities are at the crossroads of two great movements. They're seeking to transform the energy system into one that's not only cleaner but more efficient, resilient, and affordable. Simultaneously, social justice movements have been sweeping across the globe, encouraging utilities to explore their role in increasing energy equity and environmental justice. Utilities are applying a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) lens to their demand-side management (DSM) and distributed energy resource (DER) programs, as well as to their marketing and communications, internal operations, and trade ally engagement. And they're using new equity metrics including income, race or ethnicity, pollution, climate, and health impacts and other socioeconomic factors in these programs. Utilities are seeking to understanding customers' differences and modifying programs and services to meet their specific needs, ensuring fairness and justice.

Everyone deserves equitable access to energy efficiency and clean energy. But solving for equity is one of the most complex problems the utility sector faces.

We recognize that across our industry, many utility customers and other stakeholders aren't being served as well as the wealthier, more powerful, and, often, white members of our society. We know that low-income, minority, Indigenous, English-isolated, elderly, rental housing, small business, and rural customers, to name a few, are underrepresented in DSM, DER, and EV activities.

Everyone deserves equitable access to energy efficiency and clean energy. But solving for equity is one of the most complex problems the utility sector faces. E Source offers a comprehensive suite of solutions to help our clients advance equity in their organizations and ensure a future in which everyone has access to energy efficiency and clean energy.

Why utilities should care about equity

DEI isn't a new concept for utilities. They started offering diversity training in the 1990s and, for decades, have had supplier-diversity programs, often by regulatory mandate. The equity conversation may not be new, but the global call for social justice (combined with ongoing efforts to combat climate change) has created or renewed interest among leading states, cities, utilities, and the federal government in working at the intersection of climate, social, and economic issues to make sure our clean energy transition is diverse, equitable, and inclusive.

As critical service providers, local economic engines, providers of cost savings for customers, and major environmental actors, utilities are in a unique position. They can increase equity for their customers and stakeholders while reaping multiple benefits for themselves.

Our research shows that focusing on equity can:

- Lead to new savings opportunities
- Reduce financial risk for you and your customers
- Increase non-energy benefits for all customers
- Bolster your utility reputation and build trust with customers
- Enable you to comply with state and local mandates and legislation

If we don't ensure that underserved communities have access to clean, affordable, reliable energy, how can we expect to meet our ever-increasing environmental and energy-savings goals? We must address equity.

Ensuring equity is how we'll reach the "high-hanging fruit" that will deliver the gains and deep savings we're chasing as an industry.

Ensuring equity is how we'll reach the "high-hanging fruit" that will deliver the gains and deep savings we're chasing as an industry. According to distinguished UC Berkeley professor of sustainability [Dan Kammen's testimony](#) to the US House of Representatives Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, "To achieve and sustain these rates of decarbonization, we must bake in, not sprinkle on, racial and socioeconomic justice. The critical nexus of innovation and social justice is, literally, the special sauce needed to meet climate and social goals of job creation, community empowerment, and racial equality."

Achieving equity together

So how do we achieve equity in DSM and DER programs? How do we move from words to action? How do we make real progress in this industry? We can't do it alone. This is a broad, critical topic that will require collaboration between industry leaders, thinkers, and doers. The very definition of equity calls for this kind of collaboration and inclusion.

At E Source, we plan to continue:

- Using our industry-wide perspective to identify case studies and solutions
- Sharing our findings with clients so they don't have to reinvent the wheel
- Harnessing tools to collect and assess programs and data
- Forming partnerships to connect experts and our members
- Gaining knowledge from engagements and by consulting with clients
- Bringing utilities and cities together to discuss these issues

And we're eager to partner with collaborators and competitors alike in these efforts, including thought leaders like the [Energy Equity Project](#), the [Initiative for Energy Justice](#), and ACEEE's [Leading with Equity initiative](#).

Learn more about how E Source can help with your [energy equity journey](#). And E Source members can join our February 10 webinar [Integrating energy equity into your utility's customer programs and engagement](#) to hear more about how to look at programs and operations through an equity lens. Not a member but want to attend? [Contact us](#) today.