



HEALTHY HOMES, THRIVING COMMUNITIES

Equitable Principles for Building Decarbonization

Safe, efficient, affordable, & resilient homes for all





WE ACT Pilot 'Out of Gas, In with Justice' participant Mary Rivera and her daughter Francelli Reyes



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Everyone deserves a healthy home, regardless of race or income.

Residential and commercial buildings are responsible for consuming 31 percent of national greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) driving climate change - much of which is generated from fossil fuels such as coal, oil, and natural gas.¹ Most of the sector's climate emissions come from electricity used for heating, cooling, lighting, appliances, and electronics.² The next leading source is from burning of fossil fuels indoors for cooking, space heating, and water heating. Fossil fuel combustion in buildings is also an overlooked and significant contributor to indoor health hazards.³ It releases harmful air pollutants like fine particulates (soot), benzene, formaldehyde, carbon monoxide, and nitrogen oxides (NOx), which are linked to asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, cardiovascular disease, cancer, and even death.⁴

We spend nearly 90 percent of our lives indoors,⁵ yet fossil fuel pollution makes our homes unsafe, especially for people of color and low-income households. Studies show that long-term exposure to NOx from gas stoves was 60 percent higher among Indigenous people and 2 percent higher among Black and Latino/a/e households compared to the national average.⁶ These disparities are compounded by poor housing conditions as these households - often renters living in public or affordable housing - are more likely to live in small, older units with poor ventilation and outdated appliances they cannot afford to replace or are unable to upgrade because they do not own their property. Safety concerns about gas use were a top issue in WE ACT for Environmental Justice's (WE ACT) recent polling⁷ and among New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) participants in the 2021 'Out of Gas, In with Gas pilot,'⁸ which showed major pollution reductions in homes that switched from gas stoves to induction. Environmental justice communities also contend with the worst indoor hazards such as mold, lead,⁹ and pests, while facing an outsized exposure to outdoor pollution,^{10,11} and climate-driven weather like extreme heat.¹²

A legacy of disinvestment and discriminatory policies like redlining, residential segregation, and exclusionary zoning has produced long-standing inequities in housing quality, energy burdens, climate risks, environmental exposures, and health outcomes for these communities.

Everyone deserves a safe, healthy home, regardless of race or income. Building decarbonization strategies and programs that narrowly focus on cutting climate emissions while overlooking health and equity risk leaving the most vulnerable communities behind. Moreover, with clean energy and home energy efficiency incentives set to expire,¹³ federal agency staff cuts threatening millions,¹⁴ environmental protections at risk,¹⁵ and the impacts of the climate crisis intensifying, it is more important than ever to put healthy homes first! WE ACT's Healthy Homes First, launched in 2025, is a national campaign that advances a holistic, equitable approach to building decarbonization.¹⁶ By elevating lived experiences, driving policy reforms, addressing indoor hazards, and supporting whole-of-home upgrades, the campaign aims to ensure buildings are healthy, safe, and pollution-free, especially for environmental justice communities living in public and affordable housing.



As part of this campaign, WE ACT for Environmental Justice convened strategic partners, drawing on their expertise and lived experiences to develop equitable principles for building decarbonization. This brief outlines the Healthy Homes First principles, offering guidance for policymakers, program administrators, public housing authorities, property owners and other stakeholders to embed health and equity across decarbonization policies, programs, and practice, delivering durable, transformational benefits for the most impacted communities. It also equips advocates with a practical toolkit to influence policy decisions and ensure community voices shape solutions. By adopting these principles, climate action achieves far more than emissions reduction: it ensures cleaner air, safer and more resilient homes, lower energy burdens, and a healthier, sustainable future for all.



Maria Leger - participant in WE ACT's 'Out of Gas, In with Justice' pilot program, which transitioned affordable housing tenants from gas to electric induction stoves, measuring the impact on indoor air quality.

OUR PRINCIPLES



EQUITABLE PRINCIPLES FOR BUILDING DECARBONIZATION



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|-----------------|---|-----------------|---|
| <p>1</p> | <p>Center & Protect Frontline Communities</p> | <p>4</p> | <p>Empower Communities through Education & Workforce Development</p> |
| <p>2</p> | <p>Ensure Pre-weatherization & Health Upgrades in the Transition to Efficient & Zero-Emission Energy Solutions</p> | <p>5</p> | <p>Ensure Energy Affordability & Prevent Displacement</p> |
| <p>3</p> | <p>Enforce Transparency & Accountability</p> | <p>6</p> | <p>Climate Resilience at Every Step</p> |

PRINCIPLE 1: CENTER & PROTECT FRONTLINE COMMUNITIES

Communities of color and low-income along with Indigenous and immigrant communities are on the frontlines of climate, public health, housing, and energy affordability crises. To prevent further harm and ensure meaningful benefits from decarbonization policies, programs, and investments, policy-makers, utilities, landlords, and other actors must prioritize, consult, and include these vulnerable groups at every stage of decision-making, from design to implementation and evaluation. Strong tenant protections must guarantee all residents - regardless of race, socioeconomic, or immigration status - can exercise their rights and access the resources and upgrades they need. This approach ensures community priorities are met and that decarbonization delivers cleaner air, safer and more resilient homes, reduced energy bills, and healthier living conditions without reinforcing inequities.

Recommendations:

- Identify all communities and households affected by the policy or program, especially those facing cumulative pollution, energy, housing, and climate injustices using environmental justice tools¹⁷ such as California's EnviroScreen¹⁸ or New York City's (NYC) Environmental Justice Map that reflect lived realities, insights, and inequities on the ground (see Appendix).
- Consult and collaborate with community members, early and frequently, to capture community priorities and experiences. Convene an advisory group representative of impacted communities including neighborhood leaders, tenant and legal advocates, among others.

- Employ meaningful community engagement best practices, such as compensation for time and knowledge, providing services like childcare, transportation, and translation as well as technical training and language and culturally appropriate orientation materials ahead of meetings.¹⁹
- Develop a comprehensive contingency plan that protects vulnerable community members - including immigrants, irrespective of documentation - ensuring their full participation in decarbonization efforts, while fostering trust and alleviating fears of enforcement.
- Leverage existing and trusted institutions (e.g., community- or faith-based organizations, houses of worship, schools) and/or technology to create reliable and consistent ways of sharing information, helping community members stay connected, engaged, and informed about programs, services, and resources.
- Ensure meaningful community participation in all permitting and siting processes for building electrification, integrating robust cumulative impact reviews to prevent additional pollution burdens on already overburdened neighborhoods while also advancing climate goals.
- Create plain-language, multilingual materials on tenant and homeowner rights to help residents guard against predatory tactics used by utilities, contractors, retailers, insurers, and lenders exploiting vulnerable households.

EQUITY IN BUILDING POLICY DEVELOPMENT – BOSTON, MA

In 2019, Boston released an amended Climate Action Plan aimed at achieving carbon-neutrality by 2050.^{20,21} It included a roadmap to advance a Building Emissions Performance Standard (BEPS) focused on the city's largest source of GHG emissions, prioritizing large existing buildings with outstanding retrofits, including affordable housing in environmental justice neighborhoods.

Boston convened a residency advisory group including environmental justice and environmental policy organizations, such as Alternatives for Community and Environment (ACE),²² Action for Equity,²³ and Natural Resources Defense Council²⁴ to develop a community outreach approach. This process helped to meaningfully engage impacted residents, allowing them to co-design the BEPS and provide recommendations to mitigate potential harms it may have on their quality of life.



Boston Mayor Kim Janey signing the City of Boston Building Emissions Reduction & Disclosure Ordinance (BERDO).

PRINCIPLE 2: ENSURE PRE-WEATHERIZATION & HEALTH UPGRADES IN THE TRANSITION TO EFFICIENT & ZERO-EMISSION ENERGY SOLUTIONS

A healthy home is free from health and safety threats and supports physical, mental, social, economic, and environmental well-being.²⁵ With 60 percent of U.S. homes built before 1980,²⁶ including rental stock,²⁷ many people of color and low-income households live in inefficient, substandard housing with structural deficiencies, deferred maintenance, and unreliable electricity and heat.²⁸ This creates hazards like lead, mold, and pests that adversely impact health. In public housing, Black, Latino/a/e, disabled, and low-income residents face higher soot exposure,²⁹ creating elevated asthma rates.³⁰ Costly pre-existing health hazards, structural issues, and code violations block these households from accessing programs like Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP), which provides energy efficiency upgrades for low-income households.^{31,32}

These challenges are compounded by reliance on fossil fuels,³³ largely natural gas.³⁴ Fossil fuel combustion not only drives climate change but worsens indoor air pollution³⁵ that disproportionately affects low-income households and communities of color. A shift to energy efficiency, and clean, renewable energy addresses both issues. It reduces pollutants like soot by 300,000 tons,³⁶ preventing 3,400 premature deaths, 220,000 asthma attacks, and cuts energy bills by \$60 billion every year. Equitable decarbonization requires a holistic approach, addressing health hazards so everyone can enjoy safe, efficient, resilient housing, and fully benefit from the transition to zero-emissions buildings.

Recommendations:

- Target investments and decarbonization efforts on high-need communities, including energy-efficiency upgrades and weatherization services.
- Require remediation and structural repairs be completed prior to decarbonization investments, with low- or no-cost for low-income households.

- Increase funding and expand WAP, including its Weatherization Readiness Fund, to close coverage gaps by supporting home energy assessments, retrofits, and weatherization upgrades. Although 39.5 million low-income homes are eligible for the program,³⁷ every year only 32,000 homes receive weatherization services. Expanded investment ensures that millions of households gain access to pre-weatherization repairs and energy efficiency improvements that make homes safer, healthier, and more affordable.
- Develop programs similar to the Energize Connecticut Home Energy Solutions-Income Eligible Program³⁸ to provide low-income households with free home energy assessment by certified technicians and fully funded upgrades, including insulation, window treatments, and heating and cooling systems.
- Set health-protective regulations that cut building climate emissions, improve indoor air quality, and advance energy efficiency. This includes indoor air quality standards, stricter NOx pollution regulations from heating appliances,³⁹ stronger appliance efficiency and safety standards, and updated building codes and performance standards for ventilation, energy efficiency, and climate emissions.



Angela Norales - participant in WE ACT's 'Out of Gas, In with Justice' pilot program, which transitioned affordable housing tenants from gas to electric induction stoves, measuring the impact on indoor air quality.

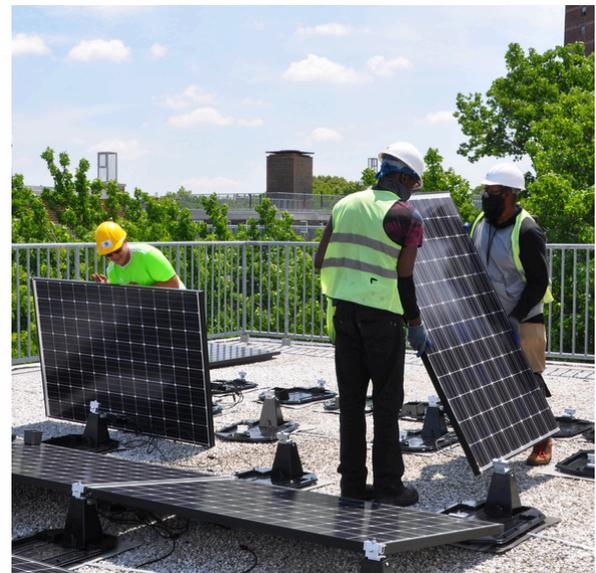
PRINCIPLE 2: ENSURE PRE-WEATHERIZATION & HEALTH UPGRADES IN THE TRANSITION TO EFFICIENT & ZERO-EMISSION ENERGY SOLUTIONS

Recommendations Continued:

- Mitigate health risks of indoor gas use by ensuring underserved households have effective ventilation, in-home filtration units, and access to regular maintenance or replacement of gas appliances with electric alternatives.
- Expand incentive programs to support the purchase and installation of zero-emission appliances,⁴⁰ ensuring technologies like induction stoves and heat pumps for space heating and cooling, water heating, and clothes dryers are more accessible and affordable for communities of color and low-income households.
- Set laws and mandates that eliminate subsidies for expanding fossil fuel infrastructure to new customers and ensure major renovations or new buildings are all-electric, like the NYC All-Electric Building Act and repeal of New York State 100-foot rule respectively, legislation WE ACT championed.^{41, 42}
- Reject false solutions and avoid greenwashing that delays climate progress, expands fossil fuel reliance or infrastructure, and increases health burdens, including biofuels, hydrogen blending, carbon offsets, and green building certifications that can accelerate gentrification, driving out long-term residents when tenant protections (e.g., rent control and safety code enforcement), or asset-building supports are absent.^{43, 44}
- Ensure people of color and low-income homeowners and renters, especially in multifamily public and affordable housing, can access clean, renewable energy and battery storage through community solar (with ownership options), inclusive financing, and targeted incentives such as enhanced rebates and tax credits for underserved households or tax-exempt and governmental entities.⁴⁵



WE ACT staff demonstrating monitoring equipment measuring indoor air quality (NO₂, CO, and PM_{2.5}) during 'Out of Gas, In with Justice' pilot testing gas versus induction stoves in NYC affordable housing.



Community Power (WE ACT, Solar One, NYC Community Energy Cooperative, Brooklyn Movement Center, Green City Force, and Con Edison) - a community solar program that installed 1.2 MW-DC of solar power on 40 residential buildings across NYC Housing Authority (NYCHA) developments, including recruitment and certification training for the solar installers from the local community.



FUNDING THE GAPS – NEW YORK STATE

As many as 1.1 million low- and middle-income households in New York State face energy insecurity and are often deferred from programs intended to provide relief.⁴⁶ New York has taken measures to address this. In its 2025-26 fiscal year budget, the state appropriated \$2 million to secure funding for the Green Affordable Pre-Electrification Fund (GAP Fund) pilot program, though short of the \$200 million advocates seek.⁴⁷ The program provides grants to property owners or tenants to address structural deficiencies, health hazards, or code violations that render them ineligible for federal, state, or local energy affordability and climate resilience programs. This pre-electrification work is not currently funded by existing state programs.

As the program is implemented, it will address barriers low-income households and tenants face in the transition to electrification, ensuring equitable access to safe, efficient and healthy homes. To have lasting impact, the pilot must become permanent and receive substantial and durable state funding, prioritizing communities of color and low-income where need is the greatest.

PRINCIPLE 3: ENFORCE TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY

Transparency and accountability are essential to ensure that the benefits of equitable building decarbonization policies, programs, and investments reach and support communities most impacted by climate, housing, health, and energy burdens. Historic discriminatory housing and lending practices such as redlining created lasting barriers and elevated pollution exposures for low-income, Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color.⁴⁸ Today, equity measures, clear metrics, robust data,⁴⁹ and community oversight can expose inequities, evaluate the effectiveness of decarbonization, ensure fair outcomes, and hold policymakers, utilities, landlords, and relevant entities accountable for harms. Embedding transparency and accountability into building decarbonization program design and implementation is crucial to cultivating trust, measuring impact, and protecting and empowering communities.

Recommendations:

- Identify and track key equity indicators—such as indoor air quality, greenhouse gas reductions, health outcomes, energy savings, housing stability, and workforce development—using clear metrics to measure progress.
- Collect and publish data by race, income, location, and housing type to show who benefits from decarbonization efforts. Present this accessibly, utilizing infographics, charts, and plain-language explainers so communities can easily understand and engage with the findings.
- Establish clear, ethical reporting guidelines with consistent, regular reporting timelines to ensure transparency.

- Link funding to measurable equity outcomes by requiring grantees and contractors to report on equity metrics, invest in workforce development, ensure inclusive hiring, pay equitable, competitive wages, and conduct meaningful community engagement.
- Develop structures and processes to gain continuous feedback from the community and relevant stakeholders, incorporating their contributions in the design and implementation of decarbonization policies, programs, and investments. Acknowledge contributions so stakeholders can see how their input has shaped outcomes (see Principle 1, advisory group, etc.).
- Provide sustained funding for community-based participatory research to gather hyper-local data on housing, energy burdens, and neighborhood challenges. Use this research both as an organizing tool and to design, implement, and evaluate effective building decarbonization policies. Ensure community participants are fairly compensated for time, expertise, and lived experience.
- Provide pro bono legal services to ensure communities' rights are protected. These services should help residents navigate retrofit requirements and housing or energy codes, challenge unfair utility rate hikes or rental increases tied to building upgrades, and resolve conflicts with landlords or agencies.

TRANSPARENCY THROUGH COMMUNITY SCIENCE – DC & MARYLAND

Beyond Gas DC, Sierra Club, Washington Interfaith Network Power and Light, and Action In Montgomery conducted a community pilot study on nitrogen oxides (NOx) levels emitted from gas stoves of nearly 700 households,⁵⁰ measuring at regular intervals for NOx during and after gas stove use. 63 percent of homes were found to have NOx levels higher than the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) outdoor limit of 100ppb. In some cases, harmful levels persisted for up to 2 hours even with an open window. The groups used these findings to provide policymakers and electeds with evidence for programs and incentives to transition away from gas combustion and community members became informed advocates who shared the health and climate risks of gas stoves and mitigation strategies.



Community scientists as part of pilot study measuring NOx levels before and after gas stove use across D.C. and Maryland.

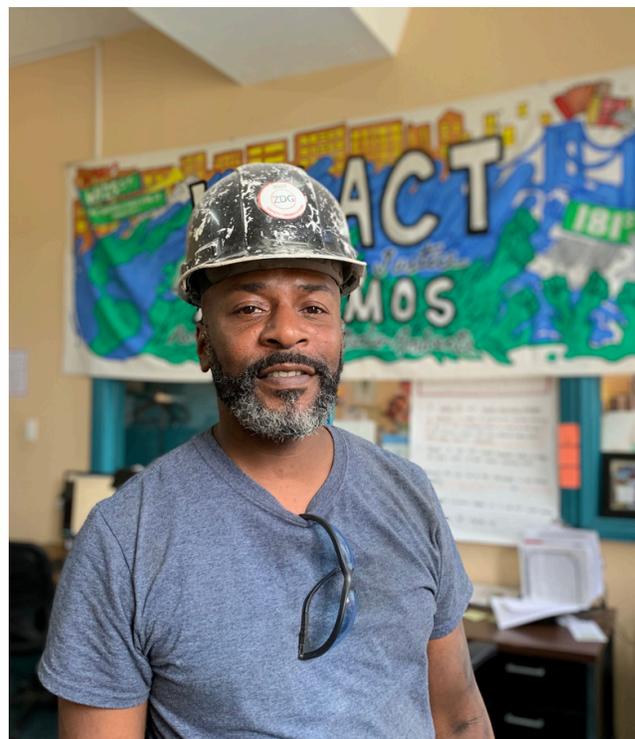
PRINCIPLE 4: EMPOWER COMMUNITIES THROUGH EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

An informed community is a resilient one. Low-income households and communities of color - often renters - live with the realities of high energy costs, extreme weather, poor indoor air quality, and persistent health hazards. Yet, without sufficient knowledge, training, and decision-making power, they cannot fully benefit from building decarbonization efforts. Education must go beyond technical knowledge to empower people of color and low-income to understand their rights and equip them with the tools to influence policies and practices that improve their homes, health, and economic stability. It also creates pathways to expand the workforce needed as demand for all-electric, efficient, and climate-resilient buildings increases. Centering healthy homes within building decarbonization creates diverse job opportunities, from remediation specialists (mold, lead, asbestos, and water) and pest control specialists to health professionals, electricians, HVAC technicians, building performance analysts, and solar installers.

In 2024, the U.S. clean energy workforce grew over three times faster than the overall workforce, adding 7 percent of new jobs.⁵¹ However, people of color, particularly Black people, remain underrepresented. This arises from systemic challenges, including limited access to training; advanced degrees and certification programs; lower rates of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) training; discrimination and exclusionary practices in unions as well as the construction and energy sectors; and insufficient support services like childcare and transportation.^{52,53} Equitable building decarbonization must dismantle these barriers, creating inclusive, high-quality, family-sustaining jobs. Education and workforce development ensures historically marginalized communities gain the knowledge, skills, economic opportunities, and agency to lead in a clean energy future.

Recommendations:

- Provide community members and residents with culturally relevant, linguistically appropriate, and accessible resources and materials that explain available programs, services, and incentives, along with guidance on how to access them. Materials should reflect lived experiences and explain what decarbonization entails, covering retrofits, costs, and programs tailored to different types of buildings (e.g., single vs. multifamily, public housing, etc.).
- Educate stakeholders, including residents, building owners, and technicians on fuel switching, its benefits and costs, and how to use and install new electric and zero-emission technologies and appliances.
- Create accessible pathways and support systems for residents, building owners, and developers to learn about, apply for, finance, and implement decarbonization solutions. Resources should cover energy efficiency upgrades, weatherization services, renewable energy, and appliance installations, delivered through training sessions, interactive workshops, listening sessions, and demos.



A graduate of WE ACT's Green Institute workforce development program, which provides free training for Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and Solar Photovoltaic Installation certifications.

PRINCIPLE 4: EMPOWER COMMUNITIES THROUGH EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

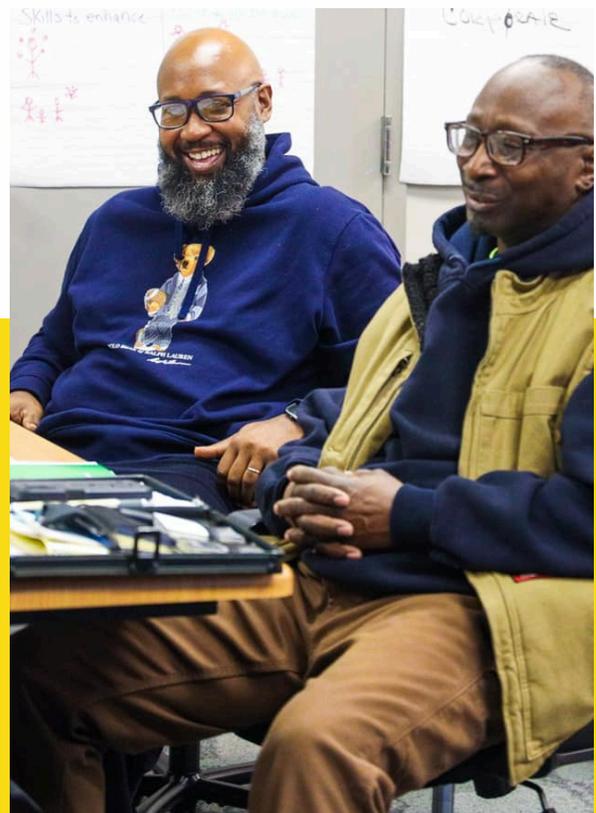
Recommendations Continued:

- Offer pro bono legal guidance to help residents –particularly low-income households and people of color– understand eligibility, as well as access incentives and local, state, and federal programs, and clarify contracts with retrofit contractors or solar installers, empowering communities to participate fully and equitably in building decarbonization efforts.
- Provide free or low-cost training and workshops to help residents gain skills and certifications for green jobs. Support partnerships and pipeline programs—such as the NYCHA Resident Training Academy that equips eligible NYCHA residents with training and job placement in construction and health hazard remediation, creating pathways into the clean-energy workforce.⁵⁴
- Earmark funding for federal, state, and local economic and development grants to cover expenses for workforce training and development programs, ensuring adequate and sustained funding to target low-income and disadvantaged residents.
- Provide training, resources, and opportunities for small, women-owned, and people of color run businesses to participate in building decarbonization work. Support should include access to certification programs, technical assistance, and contracts that enable these businesses to deliver retrofits, energy efficiency upgrades, and renewable energy installations.
- Link funding to measurable equity outcomes by requiring grantees and contractors to report on equity metrics, invest in workforce development, adopt inclusive hiring practices, pay prevailing wages, and conduct meaningful community engagement.
- Offer wraparound services to help entry level workers overcome barriers to completing training and development programs, such as providing transportation, childcare, tutoring and remedial education, career counseling, and mentoring. These supports are especially vital for low-income and disadvantaged communities, where barriers are greater. This will significantly improve program completion and job placement rates.^{55, 56}
- Provide employees comprehensive personal, health, financial, and career development benefits that sustain both workers and their families. Robust, affordable, and inclusive benefits must prioritize workers' well-being and support work-life balance, improving job retention⁵⁷ and ensuring that the transition delivers economic opportunity for disadvantaged communities.

OPENING THE DOOR TO GREEN JOBS – DETROIT, MI

Green Door Initiative (GDI), a Detroit-based nonprofit, addresses environmental injustice through education and workforce training.⁵⁸ GDI develops programs for youth and adults from low-income, marginalized, or underrepresented groups, equipping them with the knowledge and skills to join the clean energy workforce. GDI's Environmental Career Worker Training Program provides a work-based learning curriculum that has trained over 800 residents, including formerly incarcerated individuals, in hazardous materials handling, environmental remediation, emergency response, construction, weatherization, and solar installation.^{59, 60} Trainees also develop essential skills to navigate daily challenges and sustain employment, such as computer literacy, job readiness, life skills, and physical fitness, while receiving social supports like counselling to help overcome barriers to program completion.

With a 92 percent job placement success rate and many graduates starting their own businesses, GDI's workforce training program exemplifies centering equity in the clean energy transition and helps close the sector's disparity gap. It empowers disadvantaged communities, putting them on a pathway toward economic stability while ensuring they play a vital part in shaping a sustainable future.



Environmental technician training facilitated by Green Door Initiative.

PRINCIPLE 5: ENSURE ENERGY AFFORDABILITY & PREVENT DISPLACEMENT

One-fourth of low-income U.S. households face high energy burdens, spending over 15 percent of their income on energy.⁶¹ In 2020, Black, Indigenous, and Hispanic populations were twice as likely to face energy insecurity than other groups, with renters most vulnerable. Disproportionately low-income and people of color, renters often live in older, inefficient houses, and consume 15 percent more energy per square foot than owner-occupied homes,⁶² especially those in small multi-family buildings. Energy efficiency and electrification are critical to lowering energy bills, improving indoor air quality, and cutting climate emissions. Yet, high upfront costs and limited control over efficiency improvements or energy infrastructure serving their homes make cost-saving energy efficiency and appliance upgrades difficult or inaccessible for people of color, low-income households, and renters. Weak renter protections and habitability laws, and sometimes even clean energy mandates allow landlords to avoid efficiency upgrades, shift the costs of these upgrades to tenants through higher rents, or use no-fault evictions to attract wealthier renters. Equitable building decarbonization must ensure homes are safe, healthy, energy-efficient, and affordable while protecting vulnerable residents from displacement.

Recommendations:

- Prioritize the most energy burdened households, including low-income households, people of color, seniors, and persons with disabilities,⁶³ for energy efficiency upgrades, ensuring lower energy bills and improved indoor air quality.
 - Develop and implement community outreach programs that educate residents, especially underserved populations, on the health and economic benefits of building decarbonization. Pair this education with concrete equity safeguards, including hazard remediation, anti-displacement measures, and strong tenant protections, to ensure decarbonization efforts reduce burdens rather than exacerbate them.
- Establish systems where residents learn about, apply for, and finance decarbonization solutions through training and listening sessions, interactive workshops, etc.
 - Connect low-income and disadvantaged households to direct-install programs that provide energy efficiency products and installation services at no- or low- cost, to remove upfront costs barriers, ensuring energy cost savings.
 - Require and incentivize landlords and property managers—not tenants—to bear responsibility for financing and implementing energy efficiency upgrades, in addition to pursuing housing decarbonization programs that are accessible, lower costs, and ensure healthier conditions for tenants.
 - Enact legally mandated tenant protections and anti-displacement requirements, including rent control,⁶⁴ good cause eviction laws, and asset building. These should be backed by fully-funded enforcement. Safeguards should require hazard remediation, prevent rent hikes tied to energy efficiency upgrades, and block no-fault evictions.



Many of WE ACT's 1,000-plus members live in New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) developments. NYCHA is the largest public housing authority in North America.

PRINCIPLE 5: ENSURE ENERGY AFFORDABILITY & PREVENT DISPLACEMENT

Recommendations Continued:

- Create and fully-fund clear enforcement mechanisms, such as penalties and accessible channels to report violations, to ensure housing improvements and decarbonization benefit residents equitably without increasing burdens.
- Maintain and expand the dwindling affordable housing stock through targeted investment and policy support, ensuring units comply with building energy efficiency codes, health and safety regulations, and recognized indoor air quality guidelines. Enforce compliance through regular inspections, penalties, and incentives to safe, sustainable, and equitable housing for vulnerable communities.
- Require that decarbonization policies include housing affordability protections by capping household costs at 30 percent of income or area mean income (AMI) while also applying residual income measures to ensure families can retain enough for essentials like food, healthcare, and transportation. Pair efficiency upgrades and electrification with enforceable safeguards—such as rent limits, subsidies, and residual income checks—to ensure low-income households benefit from healthier, more efficient homes without added financial burdens or risk of displacement.⁶⁵

- Protect and strengthen the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).⁶⁶ Reinstate recently fired staff⁶⁷ and as proposed in the Heating and Cooling Relief Act,⁶⁸ increase funding, expand eligibility, prevent utility cut offs, and streamline enrollment and outreach so that the program benefits the most energy insecure households.



PODER Austin, TX defending against exploitative land-use/gentrification by CodeNEXT, an initiative by the City of Austin to rewrite its Land Development Code.



THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA'S TENANT PROTECTION GUIDE

A guide to help you better understand the new eviction legislation—and formulate a plan for how to move forward.

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES TO STAY— WASHINGTON, D.C.

Gentrification has been an ongoing and escalating issue for places across the U.S., especially Washington, D.C.⁶⁹ In D.C., low-income residents struggle to pay rent and keep the power on. In response to the economic hardships intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic, Mayor Bowser launched the Stronger Together by Assisting You (STAY D.C.) program in 2021. The initiative provided rental and utility assistance grants to help residents maintain housing stability and affordability, reducing risk of displacement.

With an appropriated \$352 million (\$200 Million from the Consolidated Appropriation Act and \$152 million from the American Rescue Plan Act),⁷⁰ the STAY D.C. program expanded Washington, D.C.'s pre-existing Emergency Rental Assistance Program⁷¹ to advance this objective. It was administered through the local Department of Human and Health Service in collaboration with the Department of Housing and Community Development and mayoral offices.⁷² Qualified participants were income-eligible renters or housing providers with tenants or property(s) that have fallen behind on rental or utility payments. Awardees could receive up to 18 months of rent relief.⁷³

Through October 2021, the program served around 23,000 households since its launch.⁷⁴ Although the STAY D.C. is no longer active, the program stands as proof that equity is attainable when initiatives are carefully targeted and tailored to meet the needs of communities.

PRINCIPLE 6: CLIMATE RESILIENCE AT EVERY STEP

In just the first half of 2025, the U.S. endured 14 climate-driven extreme weather disasters, with damages projected to exceed \$101 billion.⁷⁵ As climate impacts intensify every year, low-income and marginalized communities will continue to bear the heaviest burdens. In 2023, over 19.14 million very low-income renters lived in substandard or severely cost-burdened homes, with 44.2 percent of very low-income renters facing “worst case” scenarios.⁷⁶ Many of these households, largely people of color, are concentrated in historically redlined neighborhoods that now overlap with high climate risk zones, making them especially vulnerable to extreme heat, flooding, and other climate disasters.⁷⁷ Climate change not only threatens homes, communities, and lives, but also increases the cost of home insurance and rent, creating a significant financial burden that can ultimately lead to displacement.^{78, 79} It is critical that decarbonization efforts prioritize upgrades that protect residents and homes to ensure they are truly climate-resilient.

Recommendations:

- Invest and incentivize climate-resilient upgrades, such as stronger roofing, flood protection, energy-efficient systems, battery backup power, fire-resistant materials, and improved insulation to ensure that resilience measures are fully integrated into building upgrades to help vulnerable communities withstand climate-driven disasters such as extreme heat, flooding, storms, and wildfires.
 - Assess the impacts of climate-related events and actively engage as well as prioritize climate-vulnerable communities in disaster planning and adaptation strategies.
 - Increase federal, state, and local emergency funding to support recovery, including covering rents, and repairs or post-disaster rebuilding, especially for frontline communities.
 - Enact strong tenant protection policies to prevent property owners and landlords from raising rents before or after disaster events.
 - Expand funding for pre-disaster retrofits, with a focus on vulnerable rental housing.
- Federal, state, and local governments should establish enforcement mechanisms, provide legal aid for renters, and create emergency housing assistance funds to ensure low-income households and communities of color are not disproportionately burdened during recovery.
 - Establish programs like EPA’s Equitable Resilience Technical Assistance Program (ERTA),⁸⁰ which provides technical assistance for low-income households, Tribal nations, and communities of color in disaster prone localities. These programs should be robustly funded to support these communities at no-cost with planning and designing resiliency projects/solutions, including resilience hubs, green infrastructure, and climate-ready building upgrades.
 - Federal and state regulators should bar insurers from using the “Act of God” exclusions to deny resident claims or raise premiums before or after climate-related disasters. Insurers must adopt fair, transparent risk assessment practices that protect low-income households and communities of color, especially in historically redlined, high-risk zones.



WE ACT’s members developed *Climate Ready Uptown*, a pamphlet and workshop that helps Northern Manhattan community members understand individual risk to climate related disasters and provides pertinent information to help prepare themselves and their families.

PRINCIPLE 6: CLIMATE RESILIENCE AT EVERY STEP

Recommendations Continued:

- Mandate fair payout standards, capping discriminatory premium increases, and establishing public reinsurance or resilience funds to guarantee coverage for vulnerable renters and homeowners most at risk. Insurance oversight should be integrated with housing and climate policy to advance equitable building decarbonization, ensuring systemic inequities do not continue to penalize the communities already most exposed to climate disasters.
- Promote affordable, resilient backup power and appliance options (e.g., solar plus battery storage, induction stoves) for households in disaster-prone areas by prioritizing zero-emission systems where possible. Federal and state programs should expand subsidies for clean backup technologies and provide targeted support for low-income households, Tribal nations, and communities of color so reliable energy is available when outages occur.
- Ensure regulated access to fossil fuel-generated power during emergencies and post-disaster recovery and develop federal state, and local price cap regulations on fossil fuels in the event of extreme weather events, similar to Texas Code, Title 2, Chap. 17 §17.46(b), which prohibits entities from selling or leasing fuel and other necessities at excessive prices during governor declared disasters.⁸¹
- Support community-owned microgrids that integrate solar, battery storage, and efficiency upgrades. Prioritize frontline communities in climate-vulnerable areas and ensure residents have a meaningful role in its governance, ownership, and benefits. These measures will advance energy democracy, resilience, and energy affordability.⁸²



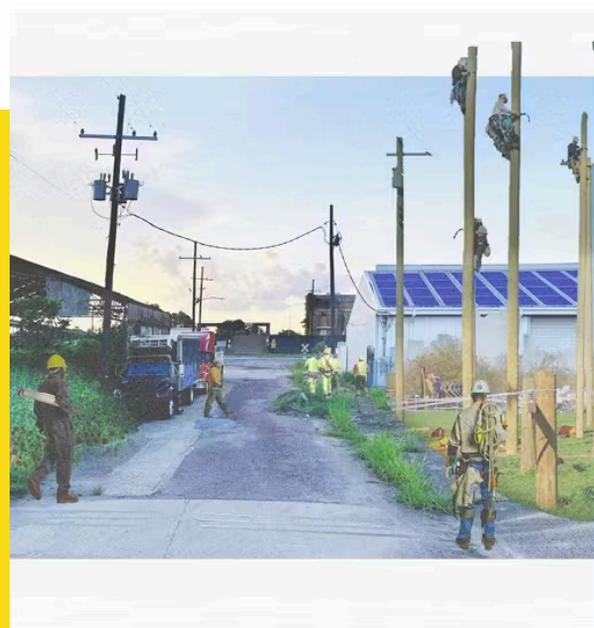
WE ACT as part of Health Equity and Environmental Action League (HEAL) led by Earthjustice advocating for climate resiliency programs including Low Income Home Energy Assistance program (LIHEAP).

POWER TO THE NINTH – NEW ORLEANS, LA

Stay Ready NOLA is a New Orleans non-profit focused on building community capacity and disaster preparedness.⁸³ Through EPA's ERTA program, the organization received support to design the Stay Ready Solar Project (Japonica) – a resilience hub for the Upper Ninth Ward, one of New Orleans's most climate vulnerable neighborhoods.

The resilience hub would include a solar farm capable of producing 3 megawatts of renewable energy sufficient to power 1,000 local homes, a warehouse to be utilized during and after disasters as a distribution center for resources and community assistance as well as community classrooms, and a training facility that will equip residents and linemen with jobs skills in solar energy, grid repair, and more.

The EPA awarded Stay Ready NOLA \$20 million through the Community Change Grants Program⁸⁴ to develop and implement this project. Though these grants have been unlawfully terminated and are being fought for restoration in courts,⁸⁵ Japonica remains an equitable model of community resilience. Restoring funding is vital in helping Upper Ninth Ward residents withstand and recover from climate-driven disasters.



Proposed 1435 Japonica Resilience Hub, Stay Ready NOLA.

CONCLUSION

Building decarbonization offers an important opportunity to address disproportionate public health, safety, and climate harms facing communities of color and low-income. These burdens are driven by interconnected issues, including substandard housing, upfront cost barriers, home health hazards like pollution from fossil fuel appliances, and more. From deferred maintenance, mold exposure, poor indoor air quality, to increasing energy costs and displacement, vulnerable groups must be centered in decarbonization efforts that address these issues together to ensure well-being and health in all homes and communities equitably.

As buildings are one of the largest contributors of greenhouse gases emissions, the transition to efficient, zero-emission- energy sources and appliances must prioritize the needs of low-income, immigrant, Indigenous, and communities of color. Yet, building decarbonization efforts continue to miss key components that realistically and comprehensively align electrification with health and equity. Policymakers, utilities, landlords, and property owners pursuing decarbonization must embed principles like affordability, transparency, pre-weatherization, resilience, and workforce development—along with recommendations outlined in this brief—to ensure a tangible and equitable pathway for building decarbonization across the U.S.

This requires acknowledging the legacy of discriminatory housing policies, including redlining and disinvestment, which continue to shape structural inequities in modern policies, programs, and practices. Without intentional design, marginalized groups risk exclusion from efficiency upgrades and clean energy benefits. Amid unprecedented federal rollbacks and divestment in decarbonization and environmental justice programs, it is essential to uphold and center equitable principles at the local and state level while using them as a framework for shaping future federal policies. **Only through this holistic lens will we be able to truly put *Healthy Homes First*, ensuring the safe, affordable, efficient, and climate-resilient homes all communities deserve.**



WE ACT, Solar One, the Urban Homesteading Assistance Board, and Sustainable CUNY helped facilitate the installation of at least 415 kW of new solar power on multifamily affordable housing units in Northern Manhattan.



WE ACT members participating in All Electric Building rally.

- Biofuel:** A form of energy derived from living materials or waste, including food crops, vegetable oils, agricultural residue or municipal solid waste. This fuel can be used as an alternative to gasoline and diesel. ⁸⁶
- Building Decarbonization:** The process of reducing or eliminating greenhouse gases from buildings by improving energy efficiency, replacing fossil fuel appliances with electric technologies, powering buildings with clean, renewable energy like wind and solar, and using materials with a low carbon footprint. ⁸⁷
- Building Emissions Performance Standards:** Rules that set measurable energy use or emissions reduction targets for existing buildings to promote building energy efficiency, reduce energy costs, improve comfort, and resilience for residents. ⁸⁸
- Carbon Offsets:** Tradeable credits from projects that cut greenhouse gas emissions such as reforestation, renewable energy, and carbon capture that individuals or companies buy to balance out their own emissions with the aim of achieving carbon neutrality. ⁸⁹
- Community Solar Program:** A shared solar project or purchasing program where multiple customers such as communities or organizations benefit from power produced by an off-site solar installation. Participants subscribe or own a share of the projects and receive credits on electric bills for the energy their portion generates. The model makes clean energy accessible to people who are unable to install solar because they rent, cannot afford it or have roofs or electrical systems that are unsuitable for solar. ⁹⁰
- Cumulative Impacts:** The combined effect of chemical and non-chemical sources of pollution and environmental stressors and their impacts on human health and well-being. ⁹¹
- Displacement:** The process in which rising cost of living, physical redevelopment, or cultural shifts forces residents, businesses or cultural institutions out of their current, established neighborhoods, often leading to reduced quality of life, affordability, and long-term community cohesion. ⁹²
- Energy Burden:** The share of a household's total income spent on energy expenses, calculated by dividing the average energy costs to average annual income. Households with higher than six percent of their income spent on energy are deemed high energy burdened households. ⁹³
- Energy Democracy:** A shift from the corporate, centralized fossil-fuel economy to one that is governed by communities, designed on the principle of no harm, supports local economies, and contributes to the health and well-being of all peoples. ⁹⁴
- Energy Efficiency:** Using less energy to perform the same task in homes and buildings, such as heating, cooling, lighting or running appliances by reducing waste. High-efficient technologies, materials and building improvements such as heat pumps, smart thermostats, or insulation helps lower energy bills, cut pollution, and improve health. ⁹⁵
- Energy Insecurity:** The inability to adequately meet a household's basic energy needs, such as lighting, heating and cooling, cooking, and usage of household electronics. ⁹⁶
- Environmental Justice:** Fair treatment and intentional involvement of all individuals, regardless of race, income, color, nationality, and/or education levels. Targeted to influence environmental policy, programs, funding, and regulations to ensure the enforcement of environmental laws. ⁹⁷
- Environmental Justice Communities:** A community with significant representation of communities of color, low-income communities, or Tribal and Indigenous communities that experiences, or is at risk of experiencing higher or more adverse human health or environmental effects. ⁹⁸
- False Solutions:** Initiatives, technologies, or market -based mechanisms that are marketed to be solutions to climate change, but do not address or worsens its root causes, deepens our reliance on fossil fuels, and increases pollution and other socio-economic or health burdens for communities. ^{99, 100}
- Frontline Communities:** Communities historically and currently disadvantaged, often identified by geographical location, socioeconomic status, and similar exposures to environmental pollutants and contaminants. ¹⁰¹
- Gentrification:** The process where higher-income/-educated residents move into historically marginalized communities, raising living costs, changing the physical environment and neighborhood culture, and often displacing vulnerable, long-term residents. ¹⁰²
- Greenwashing:** False, exaggerated or misleading claims by companies to market products, services, or practices more environmentally friendly than they actually are. ¹⁰³
- Hydrogen Blending:** The process of mixing a small percentage of hydrogen into the existing natural gas pipeline system often proposed a decarbonization strategy. ¹⁰⁴
- Microgrid:** Small, local, controllable energy system that produces power close to where it used and can run with or independently from the main electric grid. They can integrate sustainable resources like solar and energy storage and sustain electricity for neighborhoods, businesses or critical facilities during natural disasters or other emergencies. ¹⁰⁵
- Redlining:** A systemic discriminatory practice of lenders denying financial services such as loans, mortgages, insurance to individuals based on their race and ethnicity, disproportionately targeting Black people and preventing many people of color from buying houses in predominantly white neighborhoods. ¹⁰⁶
- Rent Control:** Laws that sets limits or prevents landlords and property owners from raising rents, with the aim of protecting tenants and maintaining affordability. ¹⁰⁷
- Weatherization:** Upgrades or repairs that protects homes and buildings from the elements, improving energy efficiency, reducing energy costs, and maintaining healthy indoor air quality using measures like insulation, air sealing, moisture control, and ventilation. ^{108, 109}

APPENDIX

Environmental justice screening tools utilize interactive maps to visualize key environmental justice indicators and identify frontline communities and the environmental, public health, and socio-economic burdens they face. The current administration has removed federal climate and environmental justice data tools (examples below) from public websites, undermining access to information essential for setting environmental regulations and directing funding to the communities that need it most.¹¹⁰ Fortunately, efforts have been made to preserve this data.¹¹¹ Moreover, several states have developed their own mapping tools that reflect their unique context and use more accurate, localized data, ensuring decisions and resources can be directed effectively and equitably.

Federal

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's EJ Screen ¹¹²

U.S. Council of Environmental Quality Climate and Economic Justice Tool ¹¹³

State

California State CalEnviroScreen ¹¹⁴

New York State Disadvantaged Communities Criteria ¹¹⁵

New Jersey Environmental Justice Mapping, Assessment, and Protection Tool (EJ MAP) ¹¹⁶

Local

New York, NY EJNYC Mapping Tool ¹¹⁷

San Francisco, California Environmental Justice Communities ¹¹⁸

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WE ACT for Environmental Justice is a Northern Manhattan membership-based organization whose mission is to build healthy communities by ensuring that people of color and/or low-income residents participate meaningfully in the creation of sound and fair environmental health and protection policies and practices. WE ACT has offices in New York and Washington, D.C.

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