

Resilient and Equitable Communities Panel Remarks
Written and delivered by Madeline Stano, The Greenlining Institute
[EPIC Symposium 2019](#)

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Good afternoon everyone. Thank you so much to the Energy Commission (CEC) for the opportunity to speak with you all today and for their continued commitment to serving the needs of California's low-income and environmental justice communities through EPIC. Thank you to Commissioner Guzman Aceves for the introduction and for her ongoing leadership in this space. My name is Madeline and I am Energy Equity Legal Counsel at The Greenlining Institute which is a racial justice nonprofit in Oakland committed to ensuring race is never a barrier to economic opportunities and that communities of color can thrive. My work focuses on supporting a community-led just transition away from fossil fuels where those most impacted by our dirty energy status quo can prosper.

I came to learn about EPIC and advocate for more equity in EPIC while working on oil pollution issues in the San Joaquin Valley a few years ago. I wanted to open my remarks by sharing a photo of Sequoia Elementary School in Shafter, California in the San Joaquin Valley. Sequoia Elementary sits in one of the most environmentally and socially overburdened census tracts in California. As you can see one of the sources contributing to their pollution burden is well-stimulation oil wells, this well just 1,200 ft from a public elementary school. This is the community, specifically community activist Anabel Marquez, that asked me to research clean energy opportunities as a community advocate. That research led to the drafting and passage of [Assembly Bill 523](#), championed by keynote speaker Assemblymember Eloise Gomez Reyes, sponsored by the [California Environmental Justice Alliance](#) and the [Women's Foundation of California](#), which directs a percentage of technology demonstration and deployment EPIC funding administered by the CEC to projects [located in and benefitting](#) low-income and disadvantaged communities.

I learned from residents negatively impacted by energy pollution both in terms of higher rates of pollution and high energy burdens in the San Joaquin Valley and later saw confirmed in the CEC's incredible [SB 350 Barriers Study](#), that low-income, communities of color, environmental justice communities, and CalEnviroScreen defined disadvantaged communities although ratepayers who are paying a higher price for our energy economy with their health and well-being and pocketbooks were not benefitting from state clean energy programs at the same rate as other Californians. Low-income Californians spend nearly 3 times the percentage of their income on energy compared to their more affluent counterparts. Before the passage of AB 523 only 14% of funds were going to disadvantaged communities, in its first year of implementation the CEC has invested 30% of funds into these communities. I am encouraged by this incredible progress and the continued commitments of CEC staff to work with community-based organizations, and residents of environmental justice communities to deliver the benefits of EPIC to the communities that need them the most. However, I wouldn't be an advocate if I didn't invite you

all to do more, I am midwestern by origin so I will do so politely, but I am watching you and I take notes.

I view the EPIC program and AB 523 implementation as a just transition policy—the just transition, originally a term from Canadian labor organizer Brian Kohler who said, “The real choice is not jobs or environment. It is both or neither.” The just transition in the environmental justice context evolved to refer to the social, political and technological shift from dirtier fuels where Californians of color and low-income Californians continue to bear the brunt of the negative impacts—climate, health, economy, to an energy system, an economy, and a way of relating to natural resources where all living things can prosper. The technological shift you all are leading the world on, presents an opportunity to mitigate the harms of our fossil fuel status quo, to deliver meaningful benefits to communities historically redlined and excluded from affordable and safe energy services. A just transition is rooted in the [Principles of Environmental Justice from the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit](#), two of which particularly of note for today are we speak for ourselves and the rights of communities to self-determine. When asking ourselves as innovators or regulators or community advocates how do we deploy beneficial technologies in environmental justice communities, the first question is what are the community needs? The experts to speak to those needs, the local resources available, the opportunities within these communities are the residents of these communities themselves.

A just transition requires procedural justice – the opportunity for residents of these communities to state their needs in their own words and lead on the solutions they desire and distributive justice – where regulators, innovators whomever meaningfully incorporates their expertise into actual beneficial projects – the outcomes. Now if you are unsympathetic to equity concerns or environmental justice values and are purely focused on the success of your technology, I would first encourage you to privately rethink that and spend some time journaling. Secondly, I would make the business case for investing in these communities. Developers and utilities experience significant market delivery problems in these wildly unresearched and underserved customers. They are a significant part of the current and future market for your technologies. They offer tremendous local resources, advocates and community-based organizations willing to partner with you all. We cannot reach our climate and environmental goals without transitioning these communities. So, whatever you care about, I encourage you all to prioritize investments in these communities.

Now, before we get started on this community engagement I mentioned, we have to recognize the lack of relationships and trust between folks in this room and the majority of folks living and working in environmental justice communities. For example, my colleagues and I have received several calls from major research institutions and developers looking for a “community partner” days before their EPIC grant application is due with 98% of the application finished. We are looking to improve that level of outreach. As EJ advocate [Luke Cole](#) would say, “What good is a seat at the table when you are still on the menu?” How do you all as researchers and developers begin to build healthy relationships with the community experts that are going to help your technology succeed, scale and transform California? A couple initial tips, partner with trusted

community-based organizations, ask questions, listen, respect and center local leadership. Don't use outreach methods that are culturally insensitive, out of the predominately spoken language or on a technological platform that few have access to. Think of door-knocking before pushing your app. Meet communities where they are—physically and metaphorically. Go to the communities you seek to build relationships and show up with curiosity and something to offer. State your commitment to community-led design, implementation and evaluation. Have a community engagement plan for every step of your project and its subsequent analysis. Pay local experts, do not demand the labor of economically vulnerable residents for free when you are getting paid. Prioritize the delivery of non-energy community-focused benefits in your projects. Develop strong non-energy benefit metrics for your project and track your performance. Share that information with the rest of us so we can help scale solutions across the state. If you are looking for positive examples of diverse parties working across difference with strong community leadership check out the [recent decision in the San Joaquin Valley proceeding](#) from December of 2018 approving 11 beneficial pilots issued under the leadership of Commissioner Guzman Aceves.

California has an incredibly rich network of community-based organizations willing to partner with you and share their expertise. Don't miss on the incredible opportunity to equitably innovate in the beautiful state of California. In the words of Patricia Hill Collins, "Relationships are the primary site of social change." The time is now to build new, healthy, and respectful relationships between innovators, regulators and environmental justice communities. Let's continue the work together. California's climate, environment, communities, ratepayers and innovators like you will all benefit.

Resilient and Equitable Communities (Breakout Sessions, 3:45 – 5:00 p.m. 02/19/2019)

Technological learning, also referred to as "learning-by-doing" or "learning-through-implementation," is a necessary step in the adoption of new energy technologies, especially in underserved communities that have not been primary locations for new technology demonstrations. This panel session will discuss projects demonstrating new energy technology solutions in disadvantaged and low-income communities, the technological learning that has resulted from these demonstrations, and how this learning can be applied to streamline the time and cost of future deployments in the state's most underserved communities.

Moderator: Martha Guzman Aceves, Commissioner, CPUC

Presenters: **Michelle Tirto**, Associate Sustainability Asset Manager, LINC Housing;

Ram Narayanamurthy, Technical Executive, EPRI;

Andy Brooks, Director of West Coast Operations, Association for Energy Affordability;

Dr. Peter Alstone, Assistant Professor, Humboldt State University;

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