

## **Powering Communities of Color: Energy and Climate Justice Program**

The California Environmental Justice Alliance (CEJA) envisions a fundamentally new energy system - one that is just, democratic, equitable, and composed of genuinely clean energy. We envision a California that leads the nation in local renewable energy, in which our rooftops are blanketed with solar, where our children can finally breathe clean air, where dirty power plants and oil refineries are shut down, where we receive good-paying local clean energy jobs, and where we establish an energy system based on conservation and not endless consumption.

### **The Problem**

Communities of color, especially communities with low income, have traditionally suffered the most from California's fossil fuel energy system. These communities are historically left out of the decision-making process, and often end up with dirty power plants and other dirty energy projects that poison our air and harm the health of our children and families. Our communities have also benefited the least from the growing clean energy infrastructure, even though our taxes and energy costs help to pay for that system.

Global warming is the primary threat to the future of the planet and the future of the human race. Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions remain at dangerously high levels in the US and throughout the world, with California the 7th largest GHG emitter in the world. Much of California's fossil fuel infrastructure is sited in or near low-income communities, releasing dangerous levels of toxic pollutants, including GHG emissions. These toxins are a major contributor to significant health problems in our communities.

In the past two years, CEJA has made significant inroads to change the severe inequity in energy policy-making so that communities make decisions on energy policy that directly impacts them, rather than decisions being controlled by large utilities and policy-makers detached from communities. However, there is much work to be done and communities that are hit hardest by dirty energy are still systematically left out of energy decision-making, rather than being at the forefront.

Even though unemployment and under-employment is rampant in California's low-income communities and communities of color, our communities have felt little benefit from the new clean energy system. Although many community members graduate from green training programs that promise jobs at the completion of these programs, community members often never get these green jobs. These communities suffer from a "green divide" where the green economy benefits mostly affluent communities.

### **Our Long-Term Vision**

CEJA is working to create a new, clean and just energy system for all of California. We are building democratic, equitable energy solutions that do not reproduce ecologically and socially harmful energy and social systems, starting with the communities who have borne the burden of pollution for decades. We are working towards a world without fossil fuels. We are working to reduce this

country's addiction to energy, to end over-consumption and to dramatically reduce the enormous amount of waste from dirty energy.

The energy future of California that we are trying to create is focused on building access among all communities to their own, locally-produced clean energy. This type of decentralized energy is highly efficient, puts energy production in the hands of local residents, and can generate green jobs in these same communities. CEJA is building a statewide movement that ensures low-income communities and communities of color get good green jobs and clean energy, and to protect all Californians from climate change and the poor air quality that comes from burning fossil fuels.

We want to blanket the state's population centers with solar and other forms of renewable energy. We want "microgrids" in EJ communities where there are community-centered networks of linked energy resources using energy efficiency, rooftop solar, and energy storage so that our communities have a secure, reliable and resilient energy system.

In our vision, corporate power will decline and community power will increase. Big polluting industry will be replaced by a truly green, locally-based and sustainable economy, long expensive transmission lines will no longer be necessary, and communities can enjoy producing and coordinating their own local power. We want to flip the script on energy policy-making – where community members drive decisions at the statewide level rather than the utilities and large energy developers, so we build energy infrastructure in the best interest of human health, the economy and the environment.

### **Our Short-Term Vision**

Over the next 3-5 years, CEJA wants to build a broad statewide movement in the arena of energy efficiency and renewable energy. This movement will be rooted in a statewide network of informed and engaged community residents who will be at the center of a broad and inclusive stakeholder coalition. We want to help implement the state's energy loading order and design the next generation of energy infrastructure to achieve the following:

- **Community Expertise and Power:** We want the state to implement the state energy loading order to focus on efficiency and distributed generation as the highest priority resources. We want to create a model for the whole country where EJ voices are at the forefront of energy policy and where community members take control of their energy future.
- **Local Control:** We want EJ communities to control their energy future. We want to explore and expand the possibilities and opportunities presented by such models as microgrids and Community Choice Aggregation – where communities have the power to design and develop local energy districts using innovative models and approaches focused on conservation, efficiency and distributed generation.
- **Invest and Build in EJ Communities:** We want the next generation of energy resources developed near the energy load centers, especially in urban and rural low-income communities. We want to move away from large scale renewable energy plants and transmission lines in remote areas that do not benefit local communities and harm valuable

desert ecosystems. We want to transform low-income, communities of color into priority investment areas for green buildings, green technology and green energy installations.

- **Quality, high road, local jobs:** We want jobs that launch community members into long-term careers. We want to create tens of thousands of clean energy jobs that can sustain our families and build local economic power.
  - **Local Hire:** We want a set aside of local hire in utility contracts for distributed generation (DG). Jobs generated will include manufacturing, construction and installation, operation and maintenance, and connectivity to the power grid. We want deep energy efficiency jobs in our local communities. We want to train workers beyond replacing light bulbs.
  - These jobs include the whole continuum of renewable energy – manufacture, design, installation, and disposal. We want green energy products to be built here, manufactured to the highest environmental standards, and they should be recycled after the span of their lives.
  - We want decision-makers to mandate that the utilities and their contractors hire trained workers from communities with high unemployment rates.
- **No More Fossil Fuels:** In order to address global warming and climate change seriously, we need to transition away from fossil-fuel energy. We need to reduce energy consumption, and switch to efficiency and clean renewable energy sources. We must implement the state's energy loading order and stop approving new gas-fired power plants. We must modernize our grid to incorporate decentralized distributed resources. We need healthy, thriving sustainable communities, prioritizing low-income communities and communities of color for investment and opportunity -- and resilience from future climate change impacts.
- **Deep Energy Retrofits:** We want energy conservation and reduced use of energy, and to discourage endless consumption. Energy efficiency measures reduces California's energy import dependence and creates thousands of local green jobs.
  - We want the utilities to direct more funds at upgrading homes and buildings in low-income communities of color, including the low-moderate income households. Deep energy retrofits includes replacing air sealing and insulation systems, windows, and doors; and updating heating and cooling systems.
  - We want the utilities to spend more money on deep education about energy conservation in our communities, as it is an effective method to change behavior permanently and allow our community members to gain a valuable life skill.
  - We want to work towards "Zero Net Energy" buildings where building energy use is dramatically reduced and produce the energy they need on-site. The policy should be evolved to include buildings that result in net-zero carbon emissions. We can get to Zero Net Energy through on site solar and wind, and through efficient lighting, heating, and ventilation.