

**Clean Energy Communities Market Evaluation:
Program Years 2018-2020**

Final Executive Summary

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1. Executive Summary

The Clean Energy Communities (CEC) program encourages investments in energy efficiency and the deployment of clean energy in local government operations and in their communities. This report presents the second update to assess High Impact Actions completed through December 2020.

1.1 Program Description

The CEC program began in August 2016. It provides outreach, guidance, and support, including technical assistance and tools, to overcome common barriers to implementing clean energy projects experienced by local governments. These barriers include a lack of awareness of clean energy opportunities available to municipalities, difficulty prioritizing clean energy projects, a lack of funding, and limited staff capacity and technical knowledge to implement clean energy projects. The program has two main goals:

- Decrease the amount of time, expertise, and funding needed to prioritize and implement clean energy actions in New York State communities.
- Increase adoption of high-impact, clean energy policies and actions in city, town, village, and county governments across New York State.

The program is available to 1,595 communities in New York State, including counties, cities, towns, and villages.

1.2 Objectives

This market evaluation’s objectives are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Evaluation Objectives and Methods

Objective	Purpose	Method
Present the second update to the metrics in the Clean Energy Fund Investment Plan: Communities Chapter	Estimate the updated performance metrics such as number of actions completed	Phone surveys of community representatives & secondary data review
Measure program influence for indirectly completed actions	Understand program influence on completed actions not reported to the program	Phone surveys with community representatives

1.3 Findings

The performance metrics indicate that at this second update (listed as “Time 2” in the tables), 1,341 communities had completed at least one High Impact Action (Table 2). The program reached a majority of New York State’s 1,595 communities in its first two years (2016–2018), as indicated by 74% of communities having completed at least one action. Since then, there has been significant growth in the

number of communities that completed multiple actions, demonstrating that the program has generated momentum among participating communities as they continue to complete additional actions beyond their first.

Table 2. Aggregate Performance Metrics (N=1,595)

Metric	Baseline (Attained by August 2016)	Time 1 (Attained by August 2018)	Time 2 (Attained by December 2020)
Number of communities that have completed one or more High-Impact Actions	467 (29%)	1,178 (74%)	1,341 (84%)
Number of communities that have completed two or more High-Impact Actions	248 (16%)	753 (47%)	1,106 (69%)
Number of communities that have completed three or more High-Impact Actions	128 (8%)	609 (38%)	943 (59%)
Number of communities that have completed four or more High-Impact Actions (minimum for designation)	10 (1%)	465 (29%)	791 (50%)
Number of communities that indicate clean energy is a priority ^a	473 (30%)	484 (30%)	464 (29%)

^a Community representatives indicated whether clean energy is a priority in spring 2017, summer 2018, and fall 2021.

The percentage of communities that indicate clean energy is a priority did not change during the program's first four years. The stability in this metric indicates that program interventions have not appreciably influenced whether clean energy is a priority for a municipality.

Larger communities, those with populations of 40,000 or more (n=132), are more active in completing the program's High Impact Actions. About 83% of large communities have completed four or more High Impact Actions, while that figure is about half that for small communities (n=1,463)—43%.

The evaluation found that completion of the program's High Impact Actions was proportionately higher among municipalities with a disadvantaged community compared to those without a disadvantaged community.¹ However, community size may be influencing program activity more than whether they contain a disadvantaged community. The highly active large communities comprise 6% of the population but make up a disproportionate 26% of the municipalities with a disadvantaged community.

This evaluation quantified the High Impact Actions that were indirectly impacted by the CEC program. Indirect actions are defined as those identified as completed through survey data or secondary data but as

¹ For more information on the interim definition of a disadvantaged community in New York State, please see: <https://www.nysed.gov/ny/disadvantaged-communities>

incomplete according to program records. While two-thirds of indirectly completed actions were influenced by the program, some were not. Approximately 97 communities completed at least one High Impact Action without program influence between Time 1 and Time 2, which represents 6% of the population.

Since the program began, 1,231 actions have been completed indirectly. LED streetlights was the action most frequently completed indirectly, while PACE financing and energy code enforcement training had the lowest chance of being completed indirectly.

1.4 Summarized Findings

Finding 1: The program has successfully reached a majority of communities and has high retention. Communities tend to complete multiple program-defined actions. Yet, small-sized communities are less active in the program and are less likely to say clean energy is a priority.

Recommendation 1: CEC program staff should consider research to understand whether enhanced support would result in greater program participation among small communities and if so, whether enhanced support could be provided cost-effectively.

Finding 2: Between Time 1 and Time 2, approximately 97 communities completed at least one High Impact Action indirectly, which represents 6% of the population. Two-thirds of actions completed indirectly were influenced by the program.

Recommendation 2: The market evaluation team recommends that NYSERDA continue the CEC program, as a majority of indirect actions are influenced by the program. The team also recommends continuing to measure program influence for indirectly completed actions to ensure the program gets credit for actions it inspired.

Finding 3: Whether clean energy is a priority for a municipality is not something that program interventions have appreciably influenced, as indicated by the stability of this metric.

Recommendation 3: The evaluation team recommends that this metric not be tracked, as currently defined, in future evaluation waves. The team does not believe that the lack of movement on this metric reflects an issue with program design or execution.