Clean Energy Communities Market Evaluation: Program Years 2019-2023

Final Executive Summary

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1 Executive Summary

1.1 Program Description

The New York State Energy Research and Development Authority's (NYSERDA's) Clean Energy Communities (CEC) Program encourages investments in energy efficiency and the deployment of clean energy in local government operations and in their communities. Local governments include counties, cities, towns, and villages. The Contractor team uses the terms 'municipality' and 'community' to refer to the local governments and the area in which they have jurisdictional control.

The program 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 activities are designed to achieve the following goals:

- Decrease the amount of time, expertise, and funding needed to prioritize and implement clean energy actions in NYS communities.
- Increase adoption of high-impact, clean energy policies and actions in city, town, village, and county governments across NYS.
- Support and replicate innovative clean energy initiatives and demonstration projects.
- Demonstrate the value proposition associated with high-impact clean energy actions.

1.2 Objectives

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

Table 1. Evaluation Objectives and Methods

Objective	Purpose	Method
Market Evaluation		
Characterize indirect impacts and participation in DACs and non-DACs between 2019-2023.	Calculate the indirect energy impacts from HIAs completed from 2019-2023. Calculate the proportion of communities with a clean energy task force and using Program-provided tools and resources.	Survey of communities; review of Program data
Document on which aspects of the Clean Energy Program are the most valuable for communities.	Identify which HIAs have become "Common Practice" and characterize which aspects of the CEC Program are the most useful for communities.	Review of Program data; survey of communities
Grants Analysis		
Characterize how many CEC Program grants were earned by communities between 2019 and 2023, the types of projects supported, and the impacts.	Number of different grant types awarded between 2019 and 2023, characterization of the types of projects, and energy impacts from projects	Review of Program Grant Project Data, desk reviews, and interviews of communities (where needed)
Estimate how many HIAs were funded through Program grants?	Number of HIAs funded or partially funded by grants between 2019 and 2023	Review of Program Grant Project Data

1.3 Findings and Recommendations

Overall, the Clean Energy Communities program produced annual savings of 275,092 MWh and 356, 645 MMBtus, as well as 9,324 MWh of Beneficial Electrification and 320,135 MWh of Renewable Generation. Table 2 below provides the total indirect savings achieved for the program, inclusive of completed High Impact Actions (HIAs) and Grant projects, for the evaluated period 2019-2023.

Table 2. Total Annual Energy Impacts for 2019-2023

Energy Metric	HIAs	Grants	Total Indirect Energy Impacts
Efficiency MWh Savings annual	244,741	30,351	275,092
Natural Gas MMBtu Savings annual	219,651	70,030	289,681
Fuel Oil MMBtu Savings annual	28,873	213	29,086
Propane MMBtu Savings annual	751	23	774
Renewable MW Generation annual	400	0.33	400.33
Renewable MWh Generation annual	317,323	2,812	320,135
Gasoline MMBtu Savings annual	25,758	11,094	36,852
Diesel MMBtu Savings annual	212	40	252
Beneficial Electrification MWh annual	8,369	955	9,324
MTCO2e annual	1,367,830	30,327	1,398,157

Total MMBtu's = 356,645
***Total TBTus = 0.356

Based on the results of the Market Assessment, the Contractor team offers the following key findings and recommendations.

Finding 1

The Contractor team estimated indirect impacts for the 2019-2023 reporting period of 356,645 MMBtus, 275,092 MWh of indirect energy savings and 320,135 MWh of Renewable Generation. These impacts are an indication of the CEC program successes in assisting local governments take actions towards a clean energy economy, and progressing NYS towards achievement of the Clean Energy Standard.

Recommendation 1: There is no recommendation for this finding.

Finding 2

The CEC Program provides valuable resources and support for municipalities to execute clean energy activities. Without the assistance of the CEC Program, over half of NYS communities would lack the capacity, or have only limited ability, to carry out such activities independently. This underscores the continued relevance of the CEC Program, highlighting that the barriers it was designed to overcome remain significant challenges for many communities across the state. There is no recommendation provided for this finding.

Recommendation 2: There is no recommendation for this finding.

Finding 3

DAC communities have lower engagement and participation in the CEC Program compared to non-DAC communities. A key contributing factor may be their less frequent interaction with CEC Coordinators, one of the Program's most valued and commonly used resources. While Coordinators play a critical role in supporting municipalities, representatives from DAC communities report fewer interactions than their non-DAC counterparts. Notably, one-third of DAC representatives indicate they do not engage regularly with their Coordinators, which means they may not be fully aware of the range of available guidance and resources that a CEC Coordinator can provide.

Recommendation 3: When communities engage with their Coordinator, it often greatly improves their knowledge and awareness of clean energy. To boost CEC Program activity in DACs, the Contractor Team recommends that Coordinators make explicit efforts to connect with municipal representatives in the DAC communities within their territories over the next 12 months. Once connected, Coordinators can educate community representatives about the resources available through the CEC Program and Coordinators.

- **NYSERDA Response to Recommendation 3:** Implemented. Although the data indicates there is less outreach support to DAC communities than market, NYSERDA has made it a priority to support DAC communities through the Program and Coordinator network. However, once the next program is launched, NYSERDA will take additional steps to prioritize DAC support.

Finding 4

The recurring additions of HIAs to the Program offerings ensure that the options evolve with the changing energy landscape, keeping the CEC Program relevant. The frequency with which various HIAs are completed shows that the HIAs offered for a longer time have been utilized by more communities than the recently added HIAs. Updates to the Program's HIA list provide communities with new options, which likely helps maintain their continued involvement. The introduction of new HIAs gives communities a reason to engage regularly with the CEC Program, promoting long-term participation. There is no recommendation provided for this finding.

Recommendation 4: There is no recommendation for this finding.

Based on the results of the Grants Analysis, the Contractor team offers the following key findings and recommendations.

Finding 5

The recurring additions of HIAs to the Program offerings ensure that the Program offerings evolve with the changing energy landscape, keeping the CEC Program current with the market. Updates to the Program's HIA list provide communities with new options, helping to maintain the Programs continued to respond to market changes. The introduction of new HIAs gives communities a reason to engage regularly with the CEC Program, promoting long-term participation.

Recommendation 5: There is no recommendation for this finding.

Finding 6

The documentation format for CEC-funded grant projects limits the Program's ability to effectively track and report on energy impacts. This is because the existing format and instructions for providing project information do not always yield sufficient detail to determine the specific activities and measures funded by CEC grants. The documentation format also prevents the ability to know if a community used grant funding to support completion of an HIA. Simple administrative changes can greatly improve the tracking of grant funds and determine their energy impacts.

Recommendation 6: The Contractor team recommends that when CEC Program staff review the project description in grant applications, they confirm that the description presents sufficient details to know what energy-saving (or energy-producing) measures will be implemented as part of the project. If the project description lacks sufficient details, then they should request the community add them.

- **NYSERDA Response to Recommendation 6:** Implemented. The program team will revise the grant application to provide additional clarity and capture benefits for the 2026 program.

Recommendation 7: The Contractor team recommends the CEC Program add a question to the grant project application that asks communities if they plan to use the grant funding to support the completion of an HIA, and if so, list the HIA.

- **NYSERDA Response to Recommendation 7:** Implemented. In the new program, the team will capture additional information, including if a grant will be used for the completion of an HIA.