

Clean Energy Communities Process Evaluation: Appendix

Final Report Appendix

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APPENDIX A: Extended Methodology

A.1 Extended Methods Summary

This section describes the methodologies for data collection and the analytical approaches used for the evaluation. IEC collected primary data using interviews, survey, and focus group methods, summarized in **Table 1** (Section 1).

IEC collected primary data using a series of approaches, including **interviews with CEC Coordinators (N = 5 group calls)**, which focused on barriers for municipal participation and the role of the Coordinator, specifically. **Interviews with CEC Directors (N = 4)** focused on the program operations (i.e., implementation of the CEC program), guidance from NYSERDA, tools like Salesforce and MS Teams, and the quarterly planning process. **Interviews with NYSERDA Program Staff (N = 3)** provided valuable context for understanding the program. The IEC team also conducted **virtual focus groups with municipal representatives and volunteers (2 focus groups, N = 18 participants)**, which provided the essential municipal perspective on positive aspects of the program, as well as barriers faced by municipalities, and access to the program more generally.

For the **qualitative data analysis**, IEC analysts categorized (“coded”) data collection notes using NVivo software from QSR International. NVivo has a database that allows trained analysts to organize textual data (e.g., interview notes) and then conduct a “coding” analysis by manually tagging sections in the text that illustrate a pattern or key topics. Importantly, this type of “coding” analysis is distinct from a verbatim text search, which is driven by explicit words or word stems (e.g., “municipal” is a stem for “municipality” and “municipalities”). Instead, a manual coding process allows for the interpretation of text in the context of the interview, including colloquial or idiomatic phrases.

Codes were based on a pre-defined list, relevant to the evaluation (**Appendix A**). Emergent codes supplemented the pre-defined list as new notes were coded. Topical tags or “codes” then served as the basis for queries across data sources. NVivo allows the trained analyst to parse the data by topic, theme, source, and other variables in a query-based analysis using cross-tabulation to assess frequency of mention or reference (i.e., how many times a topic came up in conversation versus how many unique individuals mentioned a topic).

Evaluation questions identified in conjunction with NYSERDA informed all aspects of the analysis (e.g., survey design, interview and focus group question development, NVivo code selection, etc.).

A.2 Data Cleaning Description

Comments filed in response to a NYSERDA proposal for changes to the Clean Energy Communities (CEC) Program were a key data source for this process evaluation. As noted in the main report, municipalities submitted public comments in a petition to the DPS regarding the proposal to consolidate New York State's portfolio of energy efficiency programs. IEC downloaded public comments from March – May 2024 (predominantly filed by municipalities) for analysis. Additionally, IEC received a list of municipal participants from NYSERDA in August 2024. The steps we took to clean these datasets are detailed below.

Data Cleaning for Public Comments: IEC originally received a set of 104 raw public comment data files. IEC checked for (and removed) duplicate documents, as well as documents submitted March – May 2024 that were *not* relevant to the CEC program, resulting in a loss of 22 public comments. IEC then compiled the remaining 85 relevant public comments filed and uploaded them to NVivo for further analysis. It was not possible to handle text for three documents in NVivo due to the file conversion program not recognizing the full text in the document (poor conversion sometimes results in an image of text, rather than actual document text) – these were coded as whole documents, instead. IEC organized the public comments by municipality name, submitter full name, date posted, whether they were a CEC participant or not, as well as was the letter type (form or tailored).

Data Cleaning for Focus Group Recruitment: IEC received a list of 1,595 municipality participants in NYS from NYSERDA/CEC to use for contact information and determine the sample for the focus groups. IEC used program data on the points and projects completed by participating municipalities to fill in any missing contact names/emails. After removing duplicates, or municipalities with no available contact information, 297 contacts remained. For the contacts that IEC was able to locate names/emails for, they were assigned different priority levels for focus group contacts. The top priority municipalities to contact for focus group were based on:

- Number of approved projects with CEC, and cancelled projects (if any)
- Population of the county/municipality
- Points achieved through the CEC program so far
- The type of project being completed (i.e., solar, benchmarking, etc.)

Using the above factors, IEC created a ranked list (assigned each contact a number from 1-3) of municipalities for RMS to use for scheduling focus groups, with group 1 being the highest priority.

APPENDIX B: Evaluation Question Crosswalk

Table B-1 below summarizes the evaluation strategy by highlighting the data sources used to address the research questions and program indicators. Check marks (✓) denote data used.

Table B- 1. Evaluation Question Crosswalk

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	RESEARCH OBJECTIVE	PROGRAM STAFF INTERVIEWS	COORDINATOR INTERVIEWS	DIRECTOR INTERVIEWS	PUBLIC COMMENTS FROM DPS FILING	FOCUS GROUPS
1. If not for the CEC program, what barriers might municipalities experience in adopting clean energy solutions?	Accessibility of CEC program and perceived barriers to participation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2. To what extent are different municipalities able to access the CEC program?		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3. What interests or goals inspired municipalities to participate in the CEC program?	Program signup experience, including barriers and motivations to participate	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4. To what extent are municipal participant needs met through the CEC program?	Customer satisfaction with the CEC program	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5. How satisfied are municipal participants with the CEC program?		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6. How does the CEC program participation bolster staff capacities to fulfill clean energy activities?	Building capacity to meet community clean energy goals	✓	✓	✓		✓
7. To what extent does participation in the CEC program create a more favorable environment for the adoption of clean energy technologies by all actors within their jurisdiction?		✓	✓	✓		✓

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	RESEARCH OBJECTIVE	PROGRAM STAFF INTERVIEWS	COORDINATOR INTERVIEWS	DIRECTOR INTERVIEWS	PUBLIC COMMENTS FROM DPS FILING	FOCUS GROUPS
8. Is the CEC program helping municipalities in other ways, such as learning about availability and how to access other resources?		✓	✓	✓		✓
9. What sources do customers trust for information about clean energy programs?	Overarching: Extent of NYSERDA's information-sharing network					✓
10. What lessons can be learned for future CEC implementation?	Lessons learned to improve future CEC implementation, including process innovations	✓	✓	✓		✓
11. What process innovations can be applied to other NYSERDA programs?		✓	✓	✓		✓
12. How can NYSERDA improve the effectiveness of CEC in meeting the needs of its municipal customers?	Actionable recommendations to improve CEC program effectiveness	✓	✓	✓		✓

Note: Check marks (✓) denote data used.

APPENDIX C: Extended Results

This section expands on the results from the primary data collection activities that are provided in the main report with a narrative on additional research questions. Additionally, this Appendix provides a summary of coded results from interviews with Program Staff, CEC Coordinators and Directors, municipal representative focus groups, and public comments. The extended results provided here include areas not prioritized in the report because while interesting, they repeat themes already covered in the main report.

C.1 Extended Results Narrative

In addition to the research questions covered in the main report document, the evaluation explored the following research questions:

1. What interests or goals inspired municipalities to participate in the CEC Program?

Seventy-six public comments (92%) highlighted the significance of **flexible grant funding with no local cost share (i.e., match-free grants)** in motivating their participation in the CEC Program. This essential component of the CEC Program allows municipalities to access financial resources without the requirement of matching a percentage of the grant with their own funds. In focus groups, most participants noted that their municipalities already have limited resources and funding, so the match-free grants reduce financial barriers and allow them access to funding specifically to implement their clean energy projects that might not otherwise have been possible within the town budget.

Among the other interests inspiring municipal participation in the program, the CEC Program's alignment with municipal **long-term sustainability plans or "visions"** was the second most frequently response coded across data sources. While a longer-term sustainability plan or "vision" is not a required part of CEC program participation, some communities come to the program with sustainability goals in mind. Twenty-seven public commenters expressed a desire to meet NYS broad decarbonization goals or to mitigate the effects of climate change visible in their community, and participation in the program helps them work toward their own climate-related goals.

Participating municipalities also expressed how receiving praise and recognition for earning points/money not only inspired them to participate but also inspired friendly competition between neighboring municipalities. In the words of one focus group participant, "people's minds can be changed when they see other municipalities implementing actions that benefit them." The same participant

described an example where their community wanted an electric pickup truck because another neighboring community purchased a similar vehicle with a CEC grant.

2. How satisfied are municipal participants with the CEC program?

As described in the main report, the NYSERDA CEC program does not formally or systematically track participant satisfaction. To explore this topic for the evaluation, IEc Team spoke with NYSERDA Program Staff, CEC Coordinators and Directors, and municipal focus group participants. IEc also reviewed public comments submitted in petition to a proposal filed by NYSERDA to shift the CEC program from the Round 3.0 design to a “local government engagement model centered on municipal leadership cohorts” that would reduce the total available funding and move away from match-free grants. Municipalities submitted public comments attesting to the success of the program, and the benefits they experienced under Round 3.0. Municipal commentors also critiqued the proposed reduction in grant funding and more ambitious point thresholds for municipalities seeking to qualify for grants.

In one example of anecdotal evidence used to demonstrate participant satisfaction, three Coordinators suggested that high reengagement and continued participation are indicative of participant satisfaction. Coordinators similarly explained that municipalities often do not stop after one grant or project; instead, they continue to come back for more, consistent with the “snowballing” design of HIA points and grants. Supporting this point, one Director mentioned how they see fewer first-time participants and more municipalities reengaging and participating at a deeper level.

Coordinators and Directors stated that they typically receive feedback directly from municipalities about how they are enjoying and benefitting from the program. Most Coordinators and Directors discussed how their day-to-day communication with their municipalities (in person, over the phone, etc.) naturally allows for them to hear the opinions that participating municipalities have about the program (both positive and negative).¹ These Coordinators explained that they value the direct feedback from their municipal participants because it is context-specific, immediate, and considered by interviewees to be authentic.

Responses from focus group participants and public commentors generally aligned with the participant satisfaction statements from Program Staff, Directors, and Coordinators. One focus group participant liked that the program provided focus and structure to work towards the HIA tasks. Another participant from a large community emphasized that financial incentives are crucial (as noted elsewhere) and that regardless of community size, everyone has access to the same funds. Public

¹ CEC Coordinators (n=4), Directors (n=3).

commentors were emphatically supportive of the CEC Program. Twenty-four public commentors pointed to reengagement with the program as a measure of success. Public comments also noted the increasing number of participants in the program, with one commentor from the Finger Lakes Region citing that 135 out of 197 municipalities are participating and taking advantage of the Coordinator services in some way. The same commentor mentioned that as of March 1st, 2024, \$3.16 million in funds have been disbursed in the Finger Lakes region. This further illustrates the need for more funds for the new and continuing participants. Another focus group participant stated that “I am humbled to see some of these smaller towns with unpaid staff making it all happen. The power of CEC is that we can access the same money, no matter size of municipality.”

3. *Is the CEC Program helping municipalities in other ways, such as learning about availability and how to access other resources?*

There is a clear pipeline between participation in the CEC Program and the CSC program. An impression from Coordinators and Directors was that some municipalities start out in the CEC Program due to the match-free grants and savings, but then they later join the CSC Program to further demonstrate their commitment to implementing clean energy projects. Though they are distinct programs with different requirements, municipalities have learned about CEC through the CSC program, and vice versa.

Forty-seven public commentors also emphasized how **participation in the CEC program has helped them expand their professional network to further implement HIAs.** Beyond the peer-to-peer learning that Coordinators facilitate among municipalities (described in Section 2.2.3), professional network building refers to how CEC activities can help communities build better and lasting relationships with local businesses, nonprofits, or even with other municipalities participating in the program. This suggests that the information sharing between municipalities and organizations helps build knowledge about who to contact within a community to start clean energy projects. One public commentor mentioned that while some people in their community were first financially motivated, they grew to love the game of the program. As a result, the Coordinator saw how this inspired them to bring more people into the projects and now they see significant change and growth within the municipality, such as projects with heat pumps, solar, and community campaigns.

C.2 Summary of Coded CEC Coordinator, Director, Program Staff, and Public Comment Results

For the primary data collection effort, IEC spoke with CEC Coordinators (N=5), Directors, (N=4), and Program Staff (N=3). IEC reviewed CEC Program data and public comments to the Department of Public Services (DPS) on the program’s importance within the CEF 2.0 portfolio of programs provided by the

State of New York. The *interview and public comments* files and references coded are summarized in **Table C-1**.² The table summarizes the frequency of codes applied to a range of topics, or parent category/code. Each parent category/code is divided into further subcategories or child codes, representing extra detail or nuance for the overarching code. The codes summarized below are representative of the topics discussed in greater detail in the main report.

Table C- 1. CEC Coordinator, Director, Program Staff, and Public Comment Topics

Category/Code Name	Child Code	Description	Example Quotation	References Coded	Files Coded
Barriers to municipal clean energy adoption				255	142
Administrative burden		This refers to the paperwork and administrative tasks that municipalities must complete to participate in clean energy programs, time, and resources that municipalities may not have. This also includes application rejections over very minor errors in the data/application.	"There is general skepticism around grants – they may have experience in different grant programs. Some think that the task may be onerous, and if they do not get the grant, it feels like a wasted effort"	57	20
Limited capacity to participate	Limited grant writing/ management expertise	The expertise required to respond to RFPs, and ability to manage and report activities could all present a barrier to participation by municipalities.	"Most of the time, NYSERDA puts out PONs or RFPs. Only a select few can go after this – we created the CEC program this way to respond to that. "	15	10
	Limited knowledge of resources available in their community or municipality	This refers to how someone might be interested in starting an HIA, but they may not know where to begin with seeking help within their community. They lack the knowledge of who they can hire/contract/work with to start a project.	"Communities often lack the knowledge of how to start the process of the actual actions. They might be thinking about how to install electric vehicle chargers in their community. They might not know who to call in their community to install/build these."	9	8
	Limited municipal staff availability	Municipal offices are often understaffed and overworked, which makes it difficult to take on more work/projects.	"Usually, staffing is the issue. Communities sometimes have only three staff members to handle any projects."	103	68

² “References coded” refers to “code frequency” data, which refers to the number of times a code is applied (and can be skewed by participants who repeatedly use a certain term or mention a particular topic area). “Files coded” refers to the number of files that have been coded, and can be interpreted as number of interviewees and/or public commentors who referenced a topic *at least once*.

Category/Code Name	Child Code	Description	Example Quotation	References Coded	Files Coded
	Challenges with using digital technology	Some have cited that municipalities struggle with the program because they have outdated technology which makes it hard to engage with them (communications through fax, old computers, no digital recordkeeping, etc.) or, communities do not know how to efficiently use computer programs or resources, such as Excel or GIS, to participate.	"One option that is lacking is the technological background – we can help communities with GIS, where they don't have the technology to do it and don't dedicate it into the workflow of different positions. You would think at this point that communities would be better versed in technology, but they're not. It's not going to be solved by CEC. "	15	8
Competing municipal priorities		A municipality can have other priorities to deal with at the moment a coordinator reaches out to them, such as damage control after a flood or a public health emergency like COVID-19.	"We want to know what is going on within a municipality– sometimes it's external factors like flooding that may change what a municipality's priorities are, and whether they will be able to participate."	19	10
Political pushback from other municipal officials		Political pushback is a barrier to municipal cleaned energy adoption - some conservative municipalities may have officials that do not believe in climate change, for example.	"Communities that don't believe in climate change, or don't see the issues."	27	12
Lack of trust in government		Based on past experiences, the competitiveness of federal grant programs, or the lack of available/relevant federal grant programs, some communities are hesitant to move forward with the CEC program due their lack of trust in similar initiatives	"There is general skepticism around grants – they may have experience in different grant programs. Some think that the task may be onerous, and if they do not get the grant, it feels like a wasted effort, so there is some skepticism about state and federal programs. This is especially true for small communities who do not often put together applications for funding. "	10	6
Accessibility				101	70
Increased size of DAC bonus		All project components located within a DAC may be eligible for additional CEC grant funding. If the proposed project is located in a DAC area, the project is eligible for a DAC grant bonus of 50% of project grant funding.	" We have DAC adders to get more benefits to communities. We have specific DAC bonuses. If the money goes into a DAC zone, they get more money for their high impact actions and coordinators can help identify projects in these areas. "	56	51

Category/Code Name	Child Code	Description	Example Quotation	References Coded	Files Coded
Short turnaround of grant funding		Refers to the short turnaround time from submitting the required information to actually receiving the funding to complete high impact actions.	"We will see people get grant money super quickly at the beginning. Program design is instrumental in shepherding municipalities along through the CEC program high impact actions. Early grant money received easily warms them to the ability to submit grants. It can really get the ball rolling. "	6	5
Meeting municipalities where they are		Communities are all different and may have various needs and priorities. Coordinators develop flexible strategies to engage and work with municipalities. This code refers to coordinators and directors being tactful and strategy with their approach to convince municipalities to join the program.	"There is no one size fits all, rather it is helping the communities in the specific way they need it, as it depends on the knowledge of the person we are talking to from the staff. "	39	14
Interests inspiring municipal participation in CEC				308	149
Environmental Benefits		Some municipalities may choose to participate because of the perceived benefits their project might have on the environment.	"Sometimes it is leadership, some want the funding, for others it is the environmental goals, or the cost savings and benefit to the taxpayers. "	7	5
Friendly competition with other municipalities		Refers to how municipalities are motivated to participate in the program because they wish to compete with their neighbors. There are publicly available scorecards that people can look at to see what other people are doing.	"Friendly rivalry – in the local paper, a neighboring village was highlighted as getting a grant in the first round, and the municipality called us and said why aren't we getting one? Seeing the neighbor get \$100,000 and getting highlighted in the regional newspaper helped them get interested."	16	7
Long-term vision for sustainability		Some communities enter the program with a long-term vision for sustainability or pre-existing environmental values/goals.	"Typically, communities begin thinking about climate action goals, but at the community level they are not thinking about decarbonization. Communities are mostly thinking about climate action goals. They take a broader perspective of things once they take one action. "	56	32

Category/Code Name	Child Code	Description	Example Quotation	References Coded	Files Coded
Match-free grants		A match-free grant is a grant that doesn't require the recipient to contribute any of their own funds to the project. This relieves a huge burden for municipalities, particularly smaller ones, who may be struggling to start their high impact action.	"Match-free grants are huge and cited repeatedly. It's not why they want to participate, but how they will be able to complete their projects."	187	82
Recognition for participating in the program		Communities want to receive the praise and recognition of being able to implement multiple HIAs, receive lots of points, and be a participant of the program.	"Communities value the recognition they receive for participating in the program. "	15	11
Value proposition		Coordinators focus is to give the best deal for a municipality that accelerates their existing plans and helps them save money.	"For larger or more receptive communities, it becomes a value proposition of how this program fits into their plans already. The program fits into existing plans for the larger communities."	27	12
Program Design				871	348
Coordinator follow-through		Refers to coordinator attention to municipalities: their job is to check in, encourage progress, and support municipalities in getting from one action to the next. This is about how the coordinator focuses on getting people from one HIA to another. Coordinators are there to ensure long-term participation in the program.	"For municipalities that are not responsive, we can sometimes do some scare tactic, bring in Director or Legal to say, "Get a move on!"	197	80
Low-hanging fruit HIAs		Participants in the program are given the opportunity to start off with smaller, easier projects to get the ball rolling. As they do smaller projects, they are able to get money quickly for completing them to build up capacity for larger projects.	"The program is set up where small incentives are provided up front, and they escalate to support funding capacity. They are positioned to do the higher impact items. \$5,000 incentives for smaller projects but can get to \$1 million."	15	9
Gamification		Some competitive/gamified aspect to the program helps get over the hurdle of participation and it encourages them to participate even more.	"The program is like drinking the Kool Aid – they take on one small action, and the outcome is good, so then they're interested in seeking a little more. They get addicted	36	23

Category/Code Name	Child Code	Description	Example Quotation	References Coded	Files Coded
		Getting money for points is part of the game.	to the program if they get good results."		
Program implementation support		Coordinators provide direct implementation support to municipalities to identify what projects align best with what is currently being done, how to fill out the application, who to contact to initiate the project, determining costs, etc.	"The outreach to communities is the easy portion, but the implementation support is the real value add for the program. I do not think the program could exist without the coordinators and we would not have had as much success without them."	321	83
On-call assistance		Refers to coordinators providing individualized support to the community: their approachability and availability to do things from start to finish. Program staff often provide their personal contact information so that they are easily reachable, and municipalities really value having real person that they can speak to about their specific challenges.	"We need to have access to data or information on municipalities and we keep track of their previous activities. I do not want coordinators to cold call – our coordinators show up and contact the communities with data and information ready about the past activities and capacity of the municipality."	166	81
Matchmaking between communities		Coordinators are directly connecting communities together to share ideas, skills, and resources. Matchmaking contributes to peer-to-peer learning among municipalities.	"Another benefit from the program is matchmaking – coordinators can connect communities to help them solve problems. Matchmaking also involves skill sharing between teams and communities. Skill sharing can help provide an example and experiences for different pathways within a municipality."	19	13
No competitive applications		Not a competitive RFP process, meaning that municipalities can apply for HIAs (with proper documentation) until the money for the program runs out.	"None of this is competitive for municipalities because there are fixed amounts of funding that the community is eligible for based on their actions completed."	4	3
Official NYSERDA Guidelines	Published or official guidelines for municipalities	Guidelines for municipality participation/submission of HIAs. There are different interpretations of rules that cause confusion between participants. This includes people being able to bundle funds together or not.	"We heard complaints about the time frame of our work and because the grant funds can't be spent, they feel like they are missing out and can't use the funds."	14	9

Category/Code Name	Child Code	Description	Example Quotation	References Coded	Files Coded
	Guidelines communicated to Directors ONLY	Some information is only communicated to Directors, and they are instructed to not share this information, causing confusion or bottlenecks when sharing information with coordinators and communities.	"Director calls are sometimes useful and sometimes not. It is a good way to get insight, but other times not. The information shared by NYSERDA was something that we weren't always allowed to tell the coordinators...Critical information like 'there's not a lot of money left.'"	8	4
NYSERDA resources library		There are resources, documents, instructions, and FAQ pages, among others, on the NYSERDA website that municipalities are able to access. Individuals can keep using these resources after they've accessed them. Coordinators are also expected to share these resources while advising someone through a project.	"There are also online resources that are available, which we assume the coordinators show to the municipalities while advising them "	10	7
Simplified application	Templates	Templates reduce administrative burden and help standardize the process and variables that municipalities need to submit in order to complete an application	"Templates are very important for internal staff to streamline and expedite the entire application process. From an administrative standpoint, communities were using different variables – we needed to compare apples to apples, so we provided templates to standardize the process. I don't want to have the coordinator role spend so long helping customers assist with the applications."	6	4
	Pre-Approved Projects	Pre-approved projects are crucial to expedite the process of waiting time after a municipality submits an application and wants to begin implementing a high impact action. So many people were asking for similar things and wanted similar projects, that some of them were designated as "pre-approved".	"We have pre-approved project tracks that are essentially painless for communities to go through and get money to move forward with projects right away."	9	6

Category/Code Name	Child Code	Description	Example Quotation	References Coded	Files Coded
Tailoring participation		Refers to options for municipalities to complete projects at their own pace. Additionally, municipalities can sometimes cancel their projects because they decide to go in a different direction. Includes tailored/unique projects, but they are harder to implement, and may take NYSERDA longer to review.	"Easy activities are often grouped together; communities start slowly and build up their activities."	66	26
Participant satisfaction with the CEC Program				104	47
Direct feedback from communities		Coordinators hear directly from communities about how they are enjoying and benefitting from the program - the trust built between coordinators and their communities facilitates this candor when sharing about the municipal experience in the program.	" Coordinators also change local perceptions about clean energy impacts – as soon as municipalities start to see positive impacts, there is a positive feedback loop where there is less resistance to implementing other actions. "	24	11
Reengagement and continued participation		Program staff have seen that an effective way to measure satisfaction with the program is to notice how many municipalities have returned to the program/how many continue to participate.	"People almost always come back for more projects; we do not have people stop at one project."	68	30
Running low on funds		Program popularity and subsequent use of funds is an indication of success.	"We are almost out of funding, so this is also an indicator of satisfaction. "	12	6
Bolstering Municipal Capacity				107	55
Leverage grant funding		Municipalities can use funding from this program to apply for funds for other programs (NYSERDA or otherwise)	"For funding we are talking about energy projects, and I think federal or state projects for infrastructure improvements, we see a lot of people applying for these programs related to clean energy grants."	43	16
Low-risk procurement of projects		Because so many projects for CEC are pre-approved or easy to complete, there is negligible risk involved to solicit the grant funding. <i>Code is similar to, but distinct from, "no competitive applications" (see above).</i>	"We see 99% of municipalities go through painless preapproved projects. There are easier projects that are quite easy to complete with minor risk of rejection"	21	8

Category/Code Name	Child Code	Description	Example Quotation	References Coded	Files Coded
Menu of options for projects		The menu of options allows smoother decision-making: the HIAs are already established and scored by the NYSERDA team based on their impact. The newest round of funding had many more types of projects and actions were available for people to complete. <i>Refers to the menu as a program resource for participants and relates to, but is distinct from, "low-hanging fruit" (see above).</i>	"Some options allow you to take advantage of multiple options. For example, renewable energy ones give you points for multiple actions in one go. Here, there are three ways to get points: if you own the system, host it, and/or be an off taker of the energy, you can potentially get three actions in one go: installing, offtake energy, and hosting."	43	31
Building network		Knowledge of who to contact within their community to help start their clean energy projects. This also refers to how project can help communities build better relationships with businesses, nonprofits, or even with other municipalities.	"CEC coordinators help connect municipalities with contractors to provide quotes, help interpret quotes and explain incentives that should be utilized to implement projects, assist with understanding grant/rebate programs to help fund projects, and answer questions throughout project implementation."	91	57
Climate Smart Program Entry		DEC's Climate Smart program has more requirements and commitments than the CEC program, but oftentimes people use the CEC program as a "stepping stone" into this new program - they still have to make a climate statement for Climate Smart, but the pathway is smoothed after having completed HIAs through CEC. Additionally, many of the HIAs have value for both programs.	"There is a defined pipeline for people starting in CEC then transitioning to doing work with Climate Smart. "	40	16
Favorability of clean energy adoption within the CEC territory				79	55
GHG emissions avoided		Looking for any described changes in GHG emissions avoided within a community after implementing HIAs	"The more than \$450,000 in no-match grants we received have helped us pay for clean energy projects that would not be viable otherwise. For example, with these funds, we have proposed, and the Village is on the cusp of approving, a project that will install a 285	25	20

Category/Code Name	Child Code	Description	Example Quotation	References Coded	Files Coded
			kW DC solar array on top of the Department of Public Works which will reduce emissions by 132 MTCO2e per year."		
Cost savings		Mention of impacts on the amount of money a community saved/anticipates to save as a result of implementing a HIA.	"Our CEC coordinator has been instrumental in understanding this grant process and has saved the town countless dollars in professional services that would never have been approved."	30	17
Changes in health		Looking for any impacts on health, lifestyle, well-being within a community following the implementation of one or more HIAs.	"Is there any discussion with the Department of Health? Health has come up and it is embedded indirectly with the HIA items, but we haven't worked directly with the Department of Health, but our research shows there are positive health impacts. "	2	2
Long-term planning for decarbonization		This refers to how the program is helping communities create and/or think more about long-term goals: the CEC program is encouraging people to start thinking about not only future high impact actions, but how can these actions fit into any long-term climate plans within a community	"Typically, communities begin thinking about climate action goals, but at the community level they are not thinking about decarbonization. Communities are mostly thinking about climate action goals. They take a broader perspective of things once they take one action."	10	8
Task force creation		Expression of capacity built; this refers to the municipality's ability to take on more work related to clean energy. Some communities see the benefit of continuing to grow their own energy teams or creating new committees that can specifically address clean energy goals in the future.	"As a result of program participation, sometimes communities develop an energy committee, or a sustainability committee. Other committees have climate smart groups that were started as a part of our program. Communities that do have these championing groups are often more successful (anecdotally). These groups hold the municipalities accountable. "	12	8
Trusted sources of information				206	92

Category/Code Name	Child Code	Description	Example Quotation	References Coded	Files Coded
Community Champions		People have often cited that Champions play a huge role in gathering interest and helping projects move along. Coordinators have mentioned that they found looking for a community champion from municipal staff helps with trust and engagement.	"We are looking for a champion on the municipality staff who is interested in doing this. It takes persistence to engage with them. Sometimes the biggest advocates are residents not affiliated with municipal gov."	10	8
Coordinator Expertise		Coordinators are cited as being one of the most crucial components of the program. They are the first line of support for municipalities to apply for and implement HIAs because of the trust they have built with the community. They are embedded members within a community and understand its current needs, goals and ongoing projects that could align with the CEC HIAs.	"CEC coordinators to help walk through projects and programs from start to finish. CEC coordinators help connect municipalities with contractors to provide quotes, help interpret quotes and explain incentives that should be utilized to implement projects, assist with understanding grant/rebate programs to help fund projects, and answer questions throughout project implementation."	196	84
Lessons Learned				224	72
Process innovations				57	28
Competition among coordinators		Coordinators often will compete with each other within the program to showcase the participation within their region, their knowledge of the program or the community, etc.	"NYSERDA is also hosting a competitive challenge – we provided a quiz of 50 questions for coordinators. There are great people on these teams, so NYSERDA relies on the CBO directors to manage them. To make sure that everyone was up to speed, they are having a competitive challenge where they offered a quiz offered to coordinator networks to create a sense of competition to force coordinators to understand the solicitations. I rely on the directors to train and manage their teams, and gamification is a great way to encourage participation."	6	5
Data Validation		The program team focused on cutting down the requests for information from the participants. They identified the key data	"We've also tried to reduce paperwork for the municipalities. We are now collecting only the information we need to validate the activity	4	2

Category/Code Name	Child Code	Description	Example Quotation	References Coded	Files Coded
		points needed and are only asking for the data required to complete the application from the municipalities	and not overburden by asking for more information. "		
Performance Tracking	Quarterly Planning	Coordinators are required to complete a quarterly plan to engage with their communities/municipalities. This quarterly plan ensures that coordinators are up to date on what is happening within a community, or how they plan to engage with them to set up a new project/HIA.	"I personally review the quarterly plan. This quarterly plan is unique because if you have a network of support services, programs change over time and their needs change and having a static SOW (scope of work), you won't be able to make changes on the fly. The council's office recommended that many years ago. If you have a network of support services, customers change, needs change, and if you have a static statement of work that does not offer continual or evergreen guidance, that is a bad strategy."	14	5
	Scorecards	Directors and program leads work together to measure success and competency, as well as have a set of benchmarks to monitor the progress of municipalities with their applications.	"We measure success by examining regional score cards and dashboards to monitor participation and movement of funding, tracking individual performance. This is all reported to the Directors for them to offer more growth opportunities. These are all benchmarks to make sure the money and services are properly managed."	2	2
Salesforce		Salesforce is used as a project management tool among the CEC program staff.	"We have a robust Salesforce program. Communities must provide information to coordinators – this gets entered in Salesforce. I review the information to make sure that it is effective. When coordinators invoice, I monitor those invoices to ensure that they are effectively sharing the opportunities within a community "	19	8

Category/Code Name	Child Code	Description	Example Quotation	References Coded	Files Coded
Teams Channel		Teams channel is a knowledge sharing tool used among coordinator networks.	"There is a Teams channel to support issues and questions that arise for Coordinators. To provide timely support for the team, they developed a resource on codes, billing, transportation, community choice aggregation, etc. Coordinators have quick access to complex and varied questions that come from municipalities. WSP responded to the RFP – they support the team's channel."	12	6
Suggestions for Improvement				108	57
Editing incentive levels		Administrative issues with the incentive levels for HIAs and tiers for projects/funding.	"It would help if there was a third tier of communities – large and small communities have a hard time finding some cross-comparison. If there was more direct support for planning activities."	5	5
Longer planning horizon		Some individuals would like to see more long-term planning in the CEC program design.	"We would like to see more consistent funding for longer periods of time/longer planning horizons. This program was founded on direct measured acquisitions. or that we had to incorporate actions that are directly capturing metrics. Things like long-term planning are not something we look at, which might be changing in the future. "	15	9
More community focused actions		Participants were interested in seeing more actions that were focused on building community actions or helping build resources within a community directly. Most of the actions are focused primarily on municipality resources.	"If there were more actions that were community focused, or funding that could be directed toward community, like if some of the CEC funds could go toward building electrification in churches, then maybe we would see more community participation. "	7	3

Category/Code Name	Child Code	Description	Example Quotation	References Coded	Files Coded
Not Merging with Climate Smart		This refers to suggestions made against the transition of the coordinator role and the program in general with the CSC program.	"The proposal lays out NYSERDA's plan to transition this municipal outreach role to NYS Department of Environmental Conservation's (DEC) Climate Smart Communities Coordinators. We are concerned that the CSC Program has much less funding for technical assistance and a competitive grant structure with 50% match that limits municipal participation. The CSC Grants also have not funded municipal energy projects—typically focusing on planning, climate adaptation, vehicle miles traveled reduction projects, and refrigerant management. On the horizon, the Village is looking to develop and expand its electrification of Village vehicles and equipment, as well as explore expansion of our municipal solar projects. Without the grant funding and Coordinator assistance, it is unlikely that the State's Climate Act goals will be met."	53	28
Shorten project review time		Participants wanted to see a faster review time for the HIAs completed/submitted.	"NYSERDA needs to be more flexible with what they can fund. But there are custom project pathways that NYSERDA allows, but right out of the gate it takes them 6 months to review, this automatically removes people from the equation because most people do not have the time to commit to 6 months of work or waiting. But at a minimum they need to do something to shorten this review period."	3	3

Category/Code Name	Child Code	Description	Example Quotation	References Coded	Files Coded
Transparent Communication		Coordinators need to have up-to-date information on any program changes and updates to be able to serve municipalities effectively. This communication also goes both ways - being able to hear more info from NYSERDA, and for NYSERDA to be able to hear communications from Coordinators and Directors more quickly.	"Sometimes the flow of information isn't always as solid as it needs to be. Makes it difficult for coordinators to communicate clearly with communities, give them accurate and up to date information...it's causing an erosion in trust. "	25	9

Note: "Parent" codes/categories are listed in blue, with nested "child" codes listed below. In cases where there are multiple children, "child 2" codes are shown grouped with the associated "child 1" code.

C.3 Summary of Coded CEC Municipal Participant Focus Group Results

RMS moderated two municipal participant focus groups with 8-10 participants each (N=18). As with the interview findings, the municipal participant focus group mention frequency data is summarized in **Table C-2**. The table summarizes the number of *municipal participants* mentioning a particular topic at least once (i.e., not the total number of mentions), and can be roughly compared to "files coded" in **Table C-1**. The subtopics noted below align with the key topics discussed in detail in the main report and include further discussion on the lessons learned and suggestions for improvement with CEC program implementation (among other topics).

Table C- 2. CEC Municipal participant focus group references coded by topic

Code/Category Name	Description	Focus Group Interviewee Count
Coordinator Expertise and Support	Coordinators are cited as one of the program's most crucial components. They are the first line of support for municipalities to apply for and implement HIAs because of the trust they have built with the community. They are embedded members within a community and understand its current needs, goals and ongoing projects that could align with the CEC HIAs.	14
Resistance & Trust	Resistance and trust refer to the hesitations some communities have due to past experiences with competitive or unavailable federal grant programs, leading to a lack of trust in similar initiatives. Municipalities may also have other pressing priorities, such as managing flood damage or responding to public health emergencies like COVID-19, which can delay their willingness to engage with the program.	15
Administrative burden	This refers to the paperwork and administrative tasks that municipalities must complete to participate in clean energy programs. A high administrative burden can discourage participation, as it requires time and resources that municipalities may not have. This can also refer to the lack of attractive funding or support that fails to	17

Code/Category Name	Description	Focus Group Interviewee Count
	motivate municipalities to engage in the program. This sentiment also includes application rejections over very minor errors in the data/application.	
Program Customization	Program customization means that the program is flexible and adaptable to meet the unique needs of each municipality and community. It allows for the completion of a wide variety of projects, including 'low hanging fruit' that can be easily accomplished or grouped together, while also offering the option to take on more complex, unique projects at their own pace. Municipalities can cancel or adjust projects as their priorities evolve, and coordinators play a crucial role in guiding them, helping to identify the simplest projects to complete or how to combine multiple projects for efficiency. This approach accommodates long-term sustainability goals and pre-existing environmental values, ensuring that each community can accomplish exactly what it needs.	12
Gamification and Incentives	Because so many projects for CEC are pre-approved or easy to complete, there is negligible risk involved to solicit the grant funding. Gamification and easy incentives refer to the quick turnaround from submitting required information to receiving funding for projects, with match-free grants that relieve municipalities, especially smaller ones, from contributing their own funds. This reduces the financial burden and encourages participation, while the competitive, gamified aspects of the program motivate municipalities to engage more actively, with the opportunity to earn funds through accumulated points as part of the game.	15
Value Creation	Value creation involves coordinators delivering the best deals for municipalities that accelerate their existing plans and help them save money, while also enabling communities to gain recognition for successfully implementing multiple projects and participating in the program, with the added benefit of using program funding to apply for additional resources from other initiatives.	13
Lessons Learned	Many have stated that without the support of the funds going towards the Coordinators or towards the grant incentives, municipalities would not be able to implement the clean energy action.	12
Suggestions for improvement	Includes suggestions people might have had for the CEC program such as: seeing other people's resources or submissions for HIAs, more community focused actions, Transparent Communication, shortening project review time, and editing incentive levels, among others.	16