

Background and Need for Legislation

Since 2021, the state legislature has created new energy programs and Congress has passed the both the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act — investments that will bring state and federal dollars for energy projects to Oregon communities. In many cases, these communities, especially rural and Tribal communities, do not have the resources, time, or capacity to apply for these funds. Language in those new federal and state laws has made it clear that energy dollars should flow to the communities that need them most.

For instance, the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and Inflation Reduction Act are being implemented with the Justice 40 Initiative in mind. Justice 40 is a goal calling for 40 percent of federal investments to benefit disadvantaged communities. The initiative defines disadvantaged based “on a combination of variables that may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Low income, high and/or persistent poverty
- High unemployment and underemployment
- Racial and ethnic residential segregation, particularly where the segregation stems from discrimination by government entities
- Linguistic isolation
- High housing cost burden and substandard housing
- Distressed neighborhoods
- High transportation cost burden and/or low transportation access
- Disproportionate environmental stressor burden and high cumulative impacts
- Limited water and sanitation access and affordability
- Disproportionate impacts from climate change
- High energy cost burden and low energy access
- Jobs lost through the energy transition
- Access to healthcare”

In Oregon, the Community Renewable Energy Grant Program calls for prioritizing projects in environmental justice communities. The definition for these communities is in HB 2021 (2021). Environmental justice communities: “includes communities of color, communities experiencing lower incomes, tribal communities, rural communities, coastal communities, communities with limited infrastructure and other communities traditionally underrepresented in public processes and adversely harmed by environmental and health hazards, including seniors, youth, and persons with disabilities.”

These same concerns arise when trying to bring more people from more communities, particularly those that have been traditionally underrepresented, to energy decision-making tables. Whether it’s capacity to serve on a rulemaking advisory committee or study work group or capacity to apply for grant funding, there are obvious barriers to participation for communities. The Oregon Department of Energy’s [strategic plan](#) calls for increasing the diversity of the agency stakeholder groups, increasing agency engagement with organizations representing historically and currently underserved populations and communities, and increasing the percentage of these same populations and communities participating in ODOE programs and services.

Proposed Solution

The agency has introduced SB 852 to establish a program to provide information about potential funding resources and other technical assistance to rural, Tribal, and other environmental justice communities as they work to develop energy projects or build energy-related capacity. To serve this need, ODOE recommends adding a full-time position whose job it is to help communities navigate funding opportunities for projects and capacity-building.

Expected Fiscal Impact

\$396,229 General Fund (in the Governor's Recommended Budget)

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