Community Powered Progress:

A Pathway to Greater Community Participation in Transmission Infrastructure Projects

Acadia Center

NORTHEAST GRID PLANNING FORUM

A JOINT INITIATIVE OF ACADIA CENTER & NERGICA

NERGICA

Acknowledgements

This resource was produced as part of the Northeast Grid Planning Forum (NGPF), a non-partisan, non-profit initiative stewarded by U.S.-based Acadia Center and Canada-based Nergica.

NGPF aims to foster a more equitable, affordable, reliable, and resilient electric grid by removing planning silos and providing opportunities for more coordinated energy system and transmission infrastructure planning across the integrated power grid for the U.S. – Canadian Northeast. The discussions that informed this resource took place as part of NGPF's Consumer and Community Mobilization initiative. More information about NGPF is available online at: https://www.northeastgrid.org/about.

We'd like to thank the people who worked hard to make this resource possible:

Community and Consumer Mobilization working group co-chairs, Kahsennenhawe Sky-Deer and Mary Wambui, lent their expertise to, and led the formation of, the working group whose findings inform the first part of this resource. We also thank the working group participants for their contributions to this resource.

Anya Poplavska, Senior Policy Advocate for Acadia Center, and David Durette, Expert Analyst for Nergica, conducted the research and case studies that make up the second part of this resource.

Staff from both of NGPF's co-convening organizations, Acadia Center and Nergica, provided expertise and project support.

To share feedback or ask questions about this resource, please submit your inquiry at https://www.northeastgrid.org/comments.

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Executive Summary

As energy demand grows and new sources of power generation, storage, and demand-side resources are deployed, high-voltage transmission – including cross-border projects between the northeast states and provinces – will be needed to better connect resources and provide consumers with reliable, affordable, and clean power. These power lines can stretch for hundreds of miles/kilometers and affect many dozens of communities, most of which want to play a more active role in how and where these projects are built and how communities themselves will benefit.

Negotiations are complicated, even when they occur between a developer and just one community. Power line projects compound the complexities: the level of familiarity, knowledge, resources, and collaboration frameworks can vary substantially in the dozens of communities along the length of a power line. Different communities may want different benefits. The projects may also span state, provincial, and international borders, further complicating the legal frameworks for negotiations.

How have benefits from these projects been negotiated in the past, and what can communities that might host these projects learn from the outcomes of these negotiations? Are there existing frameworks or best practices for communities to negotiate benefits from transmission projects? The Northeast Grid Planning Forum's (NGPF) Consumer and Community Mobilization Roundtable convened a working group to begin exploring these issues.

Participants in this initial convening included leaders with expertise in law, consumer protection, environmental justice, environmental protection, community, and Tribal/Indigenous relations, many of whom have direct or indirect experience with community engagement in infrastructure projects. The working group evaluated four existing frameworks for community benefits – ownership participation, direct ratepayer benefits, community benefit funds, and in-kind community benefits and donations – using case studies of past negotiations that supported these frameworks.

Overall, participants found that:

- When communities have a partial direct investment in the ownership of a project, they win a true seat at the table and can have a more active role in the way a project gets developed. Ownership participation offers the greatest long-term benefits but can also face significant implementation barriers.
- The balance of power in negotiations between communities and project developers changes at various stages in the development process, and it is important to consider

the extent to which parties are accountable for upholding their commitments. Innovative structures can advance equity and respect sovereignty.
- Creating resources to introduce a "continuum" of community benefits can help communities understand which community benefits are most aligned with community needs and resourcing realities.

Background

Communities and consumers are increasingly frustrated by rising power rates, ongoing reliability concerns, and the lack of meaningful ways to participate in the planning and siting of new energy infrastructure.

There is a clear need for better approaches that enhance community and stakeholder involvement, foster trust, and result in large-scale energy projects that are better optimized and genuinely reflect public priorities. Implementing a more collaborative, coordinated, and inclusive process will not only build public support for essential energy infrastructure, but will also empower communities and stakeholders - who will ultimately bear the consequences of inaction - to actively steward their own futures.

This challenge is multifaceted, and will require careful integration of strategies such as reducing demand through energy efficiency, and leveraging cost-effective demand response technologies during periods of peak energy need. However, research demonstrates that buildout of new interregional transmission - high-voltage power lines that span long distances - will also serve as a critical component of an optimized, reliable, affordable, and adequate power supply.

This paper and associated research focuses specifically on high-voltage transmission lines, examining effective strategies to engage communities – including municipalities and First Nations – in their planning and development. While existing literature robustly addresses community engagement in generation projects such as solar and battery storage, few efforts to date have concentrated on transmission lines, which are unique in traversing large distances and affecting potentially many dozens of jurisdictions. This project begins to address this essential policy gap.

Transmission infrastructure represents both a public necessity and a shared resource, holding tremendous potential to deliver lasting benefits to the broader public and the communities where it's built. Yet, individual projects are often delayed or derailed by lack of public support. Research from the Niskanen Center and the Clean Air Task Force underscores these challenges, revealing that local opposition has contributed to nearly one-third of U.S.

transmission projects being delayed and/or cancelled.[1] This trend imperils the development of much needed grid infrastructure, and points to project risk which ultimately raises costs for consumers.

Local opposition often stems from genuine concerns about both process and substance, and this sentiment is exacerbated where communities distrust existing processes for siting, permitting, and community engagement that fail to meaningfully incorporate their input, allow them to express preferences, and participate. These dynamics in siting and permitting not only affect responsibly developed projects, but also jeopardize local economies and threaten the reliability of our energy systems by delaying or preventing infrastructure improvements where they are needed. Moving communities along the spectrum of engagement to eventually hold a true seat at the table, sharing in the decision-making and the benefits of the project, brings greater transparency while better aligning incentives and delivering stronger community outcomes.

Building broad, public acceptance improves the prospects of success for any large infrastructure project. However, there are surprisingly few practical tools and resources

The Northeast Grid Planning Forum

This project is initiated through the Consumer and Community Mobilization Roundtable convened by the Northeast Grid Planning Forum (NGPF), a Canadian-US, non-partisan, non-profit initiative stewarded by U.S.-based Acadia Center and Canada-based Nergica.

Ultimately, NGPF aims to foster a more affordable, reliable, and resilient electric grid by removing planning silos and providing opportunities for more coordinated planning and consideration of shared benefits. Balancing generation and demand-side energy resources more comprehensively across the integrated power grids of northeast North America means energy system planners can make better use of existing assets and ensure new infrastructure is designed to deliver the most benefit.

NGPF brings together stakeholders from seven U.S. states and six Canadian provinces in the Northeast, and includes representatives of government, labor, environmental justice, Indigenous, industry, consumer, and environmental groups to increase trust and support for sound infrastructure development through broad stakeholder

[1] https://www.niskanencenter.org/a-closer-look-at-the-role-of-litigation-and-opposition-in-transmission-projects-undergoing-federal-permitting/

available to help communities engage effectively, facilitate the mitigation of their concerns, and have a degree of control over how infrastructure is developed within their jurisdictions. It is left to individual communities and Tribal/Indigenous Nations to negotiate for benefits across the table from developers, often without parity of resources and comparable expertise in energy or legal support. These resourcing and power imbalances can lead to mistrust, while lack of information parity regularly leads to costly project delays and missed opportunities for mutual benefit: the local community and our broader society both lose. These challenges are even more pronounced for transmission projects that span numerous jurisdictions, where building consensus across multiple parties is even more challenging.

Purpose of this Project

This report is the culmination of a two-part analysis on how to advance toward more effective and equitable community benefits negotiations for transmission projects. In it, the authors focus on benefits to communities – including tangible benefits like new facilities and services, economic benefits for whole communities and individual households, and more equitable power dynamics – and how to practically achieve them.

Transmission Keeps Community Power Flowing

While building public support is challenging for energy projects broadly, it is particularly acute for transmission infrastructure because these projects span long distances, require approval from multiple communities and jurisdictions, and are subject to lengthy and complex planning, permitting, review and financing processes. Because transmission projects cross diverse municipalities and, at times, Tribal/Indigenous nations, coordination and consensus-building become more challenging.

In this report, the authors combine a review of existing research, documentation, and case studies with insights gleaned from a working group of community leaders and respected experts. Working group facilitators asked the question: "how might leaders in communities with varying degrees of resources, knowledge, and capacity achieve the most beneficial outcomes possible?" This report offers answers to this question, whenever possible, and charts the path forward to continue this exploration.

Part 1 of this work catalogues and elevates successful real-world case studies for four community benefits approaches, including the possibility of community ownership participation. This material offers proof of concept for approaches like ownership participation and direct ratepayer benefits that may be less familiar to stakeholders.

Part 2 captures the insights gathered from a working group of consumer and community leaders from the U.S. and Canada, identifying specific areas of further inquiry on a path toward creating new policy and community tools. The end goal is to empower communities with actionable community benefits models that level the imbalance of power between developers and communities, increase the likelihood of mutual trust at the negotiating table, and lead to greater public participation and success for transmission infrastructure projects.

The Northeast Grid Planning Forum was formed to address the need for more proactive, holistic, and stakeholder-driven energy planning processes across the region. All clean energy solutions, including behind the meter and distributed resources and energy efficiency resources that center the consumer, should also be considered when evaluating the most resilient and affordable way to meet our future energy needs. New transmission lines across the U.S. - Canadian border will nonetheless play an important role in providing reliable clean energy to households and businesses across the region.

As planning and investment in transmission accelerates, developing frameworks that support community engagement and benefits-sharing is both timely and essential. When communities have a genuine stake in the success of transmission projects, the resulting local support can reduce opposition and project risk, leading to fewer delays. This increased certainty can also improve both the speed and affordability of project development, benefiting host communities and the public at large. By centering community interests and ownership in transmission planning and development, one can contribute to a more resilient, equitable, and widely supported energy infrastructure for the future.

Project Methodology

This project was designed in two complementary parts. The first part aimed to advance understanding of community benefits frameworks, and the second considered practical pathways to secure equitable benefits for the many communities along a transmission line route that might host a portion of the project.

Part 1. Part 1 began with a comprehensive literature review and identification of notable and unique examples of meaningful community engagement in large-scale energy infrastructure projects. This review informed the categorization of projects into four discrete community benefit frameworks: 1. In-Kind Community Benefits and Donations 2. Community Benefit Funds 3. Direct Ratepayer Benefits and 4. Ownership Participation. This approach helps organize the current landscape of community benefits and reveals two promising models worthy of deeper consideration and focus. While less commonly adopted, **direct ratepayer benefits** and **ownership participation** offer significant potential for broader

application and impact when considering the need to provide equitable benefits to dozens of communities along a transmission line route.

Part 2. Alongside two working group co-chairs, co-convenors of the NGPF initiative engaged a select group of highly regarded consumer and community advocates and stakeholders from the northeast U.S. and eastern Canada. Participants were nominated based on their deep expertise in energy systems and close connections to the effects of infrastructure development on communities and consumers. Through a facilitated discussion, the working group assessed the perceived value, benefits, and limitations of the four identified models. They also explored whether certain models offered potential for improved community participation, transparency, trust, and more successful outcomes.

These initial discussions have established an important baseline to guide future inquiry, with the goal of developing a practical roadmap for communities facing proposed transmission projects to engage and self-advocate more effectively. The working group's continued analysis of the needs and factors influencing decision-makers will lead to policy recommendations to support greater public participation in transmission projects and provide the tools communities need to pursue opportunities that align with local goals.

Part 1: Four Frameworks for Community Participation: A Guide

Communities across the northeast are seeking more involvement and greater control over the energy systems that shape their daily lives.[2] Understanding the landscape of how some communities have benefitted from large-scale projects, and capturing best practices in policy and planning, has never been more important. Yet, the pathways for communities to participate meaningfully in these projects – especially as partners with the ability to truly influence project outcomes – are still emerging and often complex.

To inform this evolving conversation, the following guide presents a focused summary of literature and real-world case studies to demonstrate the potential for new policy approaches. By examining a range of innovative projects and engagement models, where significant leadership has been shown by communities, developers, and utilities, this guide offers a grounded perspective on what's possible: alternative designs for benefit structures, the impact of various approaches, and where innovative models are beginning to take hold. The goal is to provide a practical foundation for communities, policymakers, and stakeholders to better understand the spectrum of opportunities and challenges of different

[2] https://acadiacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Community-EnergyVision.pdf

approaches, setting the stage for deeper exploration and actionable policy outcomes that can be incorporated into an improved approach to infrastructure decision-making.

The four frameworks for community benefits are:

1. Ownership Participation

Direct ownership stake in a project, either for individual communities or a collective of communities.

2. Direct Ratepayer Benefits

Rebates or bill credits on electricity bills for communities that host transmission infrastructure.

3. Community Benefit Funds

Funds that are paid by a project developer directly to a municipality or other designated entity and can include stipulations on how the funds are used.

4. In-Kind Community Benefits and Donations

Sharing of infrastructure or the contribution of specific amenities or facilities.

The first two models – ownership participation and direct ratepayer benefits – represent more innovative approaches, offering new pathways for community involvement and benefit. In contrast, the latter two models are more commonly recognized and understood. Researchers also identified additional benefits, not linked to one of the four frameworks, which are also catalogued. A table summarizing the models and potential benefits, and the complete the literature review, are included in appendix.

While successful examples of ownership participation can be found in the literature review on both sides of the Can-Am border, legal frameworks and public financing facilities aimed to promote First Nations participation in major development projects mean that this approach is implemented more often in Canada than in the U.S. Some examples include:

Hydro-Québec's engagements with the Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke, which resulted in a first-of-its-kind agreement for shared utility and First Nations ownership of a 58-kilometer transmission line [Click here to read case study].

The Alliance de l'Est, a community partnership consisting of 209 communities from 16 municipalities and the First Nation Wolastoqiyik Wahsipekuk, partnered with developers in the financing, development, and ongoing operation of wind farms in its territory [Click here to read case study].

In the United States, Vineyard Wind (an offshore development company), has established an agreement with the community co-op Vineyard Power (made up of over 1,400 households and businesses) that includes an investigation of opportunities for Vineyard Power to finance, purchase, own, or take an equity position in a utility-scale offshore wind project [Click here to read case study].

Part 2: Working Group Convening

Expert facilitators and working group co-chairs:

- Briefed community leaders and experts on four models for community benefits.
- Engaged participants in a discussion about the pros and cons of each model, and the power dynamics that enable effective community negotiations.
- Aligned participants on a path forward for creating a framework for facilitating equitable community benefit negotiations.

In June 2025, the NGPF initiative convened a working group within its Consumer and Community Mobilization Roundtable, bringing together twelve stakeholders and two co-chairs from the northeastern U.S. and eastern Canada. Participants included leaders with expertise in the law, consumer protection, environmental justice, environmental protection, community, and Tribal/Indigenous relations, all of whom had direct or indirect experience with community engagement in infrastructure projects.

The working group's discussions built directly on the analysis conducted in Part 1, which catalogued real-world case studies and models of community benefits. Drawing from the four frameworks and insights identified from the literature review, this convening aimed to test and expand upon these models through direct dialogue with experts and community advocates. The curated examples and frameworks from Part 1 served as a foundation for structured discussion, helping participants assess the relevance, benefits, and limitations of each approach in real-world contexts. This process was designed to surface any areas of consensus, highlight promising models for community benefits, and identify information gaps that, if addressed, could assist communities facing proposed transmission projects with clearer pathways to action.

This convening marks the first step in a broader stakeholder engagement process around community benefits for transmission projects, with the ultimate goal of developing a practical toolkit for municipalities and actionable guidance for policymakers. The initial engagement was intentionally designed from a consumer and community perspective, recognizing that communities and consumers have the most at stake in transmission infrastructure decisions and should be at the center of shaping future policy and practice.

Objectives and Approach:

The working group convening aimed to:

- Initiate a focused conversation on the types of benefits available to communities hosting transmission projects, grounded in practical case study examples.
- Identify benefits and limitations of four distinct approaches to distributing community benefits.
- Identify key questions and potential roadblocks to developing practical guidance for effective community engagement and support.

Who Convened

Two working group co-chairs helped design and lead the convening and identified working group participants. Co-chairs and participants were carefully selected to reflect NGPF's goal of more coordinated, stakeholder-informed, transmission infrastructure planning across northeast North America.

The working group's co-chairs have deep roots in their respective communities; former Grand Chief Kahsennénhawe Sky-Deer of Québec and Massachusetts community leader Mary Wambui both brought invaluable firsthand perspectives to the process. Their insights and participation in the discussion set the tone, emphasizing the vital role of direct community engagement in developing successful projects.

Co-Chairs

Kahsennenhawe Sky-Deer is the former Grand Chief of the Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke. In 2021, she was the first woman, who also identifies as 2SLGBTQ+, to ever be elected to the position. Prior to that, she served her community as a Council Chief for 12 years. During her tenure she signed an historic deal with Hydro-Québec for a partnership to bring clean renewable electricity to New York City via the Champlain Hudson Power Express transmission project (known as the Hertel-New York Interconnection Line in her province). The deal, signed by Chief Sky-Deer, the CEO of Hydro-Québec, and the Québec Minister responsible for Relations with the

First Nations and the Inuit, officially designated the Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke and Hydro-Québec as co-owners of the Hertel-New York Interconnection Line.

Mary Wambui is a high profile and well-respected Director of Asset Management, Residents and Energy for the Planning Office for Urban Affairs (POUA), a non-profit social justice ministry of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston that develops and operated affordable housing across Massachusetts. She also serves as a Councilor in the Massachusetts EEAC–the Energy Efficiency Advisory Council–where among other things she is the co-chair of the EEAC's Energy Equity Working Group. She is also a member of the Massachusetts Grid Modernization's Advisory Council Equity Working Group, serves on the Board of Green Energy Consumers Alliance, Alliance for Climate Leadership, the Energy Transformation Advisory Board, Climate Exchange and the Coalition for a Better Acre in Lowell. She is well recognized as a leader and advocate for housing, climate, and energy equity in the region.

Working Group Participants

Additional participants were nominated and selected with the assistance of the co-chairs:

- Tarshire Battle, Roots 2 Empower (U.S.)
- Mireille Bejjani, Slingshot (U.S.)
- Seth Berry, Our Power (U.S.)*
- Kevin Bryan, Equnival Partners (U.S.)
- Carlos Castiblanco, Option Consommateurs (Canada)
- Larry Chretien, Green Energy Consumers Alliance (U.S.)
- Jason Dion, Clean Economy Fund (Canada)
- Ben Kaden, Our Power (U.S)
- Adam Kurland, Environmental Defense Fund (U.S.)
- Thomas Arnason McNeil, Ecology Action Centre, as a participant in the Nova Scotia Energy Poverty Task Force (Canada)
- Jack Shapiro, Natural Resources Defense Council (U.S.)*
- Fred Vicaire, Mi'gmawie Mawiomi Business Corporation (Canada)

* Provided comments through email correspondence outside of working group convening

Participant Contributions to the Dialogue

Working group participants were provided advance materials and asked to consider the four framework approaches. During the session, they were provided a hypothetical transmission line scenario and asked to consider the impacts on five representative community types: a large rural municipality, a small rural village, an Indigenous community, a well-resourced suburban community, and a former manufacturing/industrial community.

Through this exercise, participants identified specific opportunities and challenges for each framework. Some concerns included access to resources and opportunities for more affordable electricity for low-income consumers.

Particular attention was paid to how benefits are felt across communities:

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"[Direct Ratepayer Benefits] are especially beneficial for lower income renters or people who are more sensitive to energy bills. And they are also quite politically attractive in Québec, where there's a social contract…in building infrastructure… I guess the drawback would be that although this money would go to the people that need it the most, it doesn't go necessarily to community leaders or investment projects."

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Questions were also raised about ratepayer impacts. Working group members made the point that costs of community benefits can ultimately be passed on to ratepayers:

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"A question that has arisen in communities that I work with is where does that money come from? Does it just get folded into what customers are charged for the project?"

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They also considered whether the collective ratepayer base indirectly paying for benefits received by host communities is a better outcome compared to a recent example in which a project was initially opposed by the host community but ultimately built, with ratepayers footing the bill for legal fees and the host community receiving no benefits:

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"[The] alternative at that time was more expensive to [one state] but earned the full support of impacted residents thanks to its design and greater tangible community

benefit. A key question for us is this: since [one beneficiary] ended up paying $500M extra for a political and legal battle -- what if instead they had opted for a project that had $758M in community benefits, instead of one that only had $258M?"

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"If you start from the get go with including the First Nations and municipalities, you're definitely going to de-risk projects for the future."

* * * * *

As the exercise progressed, the focus shifted towards envisioning how all the example representative communities could achieve what is both most beneficial and most achievable considering the power dynamics and existing resources and capacity in each host community, which would likely vary widely along the route of a transmission line. Participants began to discuss how this dynamic may represent itself across the four different frameworks:

* * * * *

"I originally was picturing it as a collection of four discrete pieces of a framework, but now I'm wondering if this is more of a continuum of discussion…moving towards ownership models, which I think allows for more of a conversation with utilities or governments in combination with these communities. And then the communities…build from benefits to community investments to community ownership."

* * * * *

"It's step by step. And it may end up beginning at what's the fastest and the most beneficial for communities at this stage."

* * * * *

There was a sense that community ownership participation is a very desirable outcome, but also a recognition of the complexity of implementing this approach. Several participants supported the idea of a continuum that outlines a clear path for some communities to evolve from other models toward a community ownership participation model, and interest in identifying what that pathway would look like.

Of the four models, the most interest and discussion was in an ownership participation model:

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"If you're trying to convince people this isn't the status quo, community ownership stands out and is really interesting. Everything else looks like compensation rather than participation which makes a difference... An obvious criticism is payments are seen as buying people off. That's always going to be present in a financial transaction."

* * * * *

There was also recognition that each of the models had value, dependent on local circumstances and community priorities.

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"[...] ratepayer benefits are helpful because it aligns the purpose of the project with the benefits people are seeing–which seems logical and there are other ways for things to go to communities like property taxes versus something like a playground where you could run the risk of dropping a couple of pennies – it's a $3bn project and all we got was this lousy t-shirt kind of thing."

* * * * *

The idea of a continuum towards Ownership Participation was explored further by the working group, and the discussion covered what that continuum would look like and what questions it would answer:

* * * * *

"We've been circling around...'who is the distributor of the benefits?' ...Because I think in that way that determines what the engagement and negotiation process is. Ownership participation could mean ownership to distribute money towards a specific benefit."

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Working group members explored why the distributor of benefits was an important element in the continuum, and other relevant power dynamics:

* * * * *

"[The distributor of the funds] ultimately has the power over the structure and what the engagement between the community or sets of communities look like."

* * * * *

"In addition to who has the power in the negotiations, I think a factor is what does enforcement or accountability look like, and who would have power in that? That also

can make some models more or less attractive than others depending on who has the power, not just at the at the beginning…but throughout, to actually make sure it happens the way it was laid out to happen."

* * * * *

This conversation also spanned differences between negotiating as a municipality and as a Tribal/Indigenous Nation, the considerations for projects that cross traditional territory, and the ways that inclusion in decision-making can strengthen projects, using actual examples of negotiations that working group members had participated in:

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"The [Tribe] didn't view themselves as municipalities. They view themselves as sovereign government. It was important to negotiate on a nation-to-nation basis, hence why they wanted their own wind farm, where they would have 50% equity participation and governance participation as well, too. It was very important for us not to just be passive drivers and get the money, but to play an active role in the creation of the wind project, specifically on traditional territory."

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Leadership by developers and utilities emerged as an important feature in some of the most compelling examples of negotiations. Participants mentioned that both partnerships and projects were strengthened by a willingness to innovate among leadership at developers and utilities.

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"I believe when [the developer] was interviewed by the media when they asked her, 'why are you even including the [Tribe]?' she said, 'because we're going through their house.' To have that kind of shift in the mentality of a CEO of a major corporation like that, acknowledging the land of our people…that was significant. And then even Bill de Blasio…who was the Mayor of New York, said if it wasn't for the Mohawks, Hydro-Québec wouldn't have gotten the project…I think that was significant in showing that First Nations inclusion can actually be seen as a strength rather than…a barrier or a weakness. We bring different worldview about the environment, environmental stewardship, sustainability… We've been touting this for centuries now about…when the day comes that all the water is polluted and the air is polluted and the animals are sick, we can't eat money. We have to have balance."

* * * * *

"For us, it's not only an economic driver, but it's also a cultural driver for our Members from each of the three communities."

* * * * *

The working group also discussed barriers for the Ownership Participation model, which would be considered the end of the continuum, citing some examples of negotiations (including those that members of the working group had participated in) and discussing whether these barriers should dissuade communities from pursuing Ownership Participation:

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"There are a number of challenges for ownership of transmission lines, and the big one really is…navigating the legal and regulatory process of ownership. And that's at the state PUC level, at FERC. Hiring attorneys and experts in that space is costly. It's time consuming."

* * * * *

"It was difficult actually getting [the developer] to wrap their mind around doing an ownership benefits agreement because they have specific rules or laws that govern how they operate. So to even consider having a third party…let alone a First Nation, be a co-owner of the infrastructure was something that was unheard of and probably never thought of. So it really took leadership -- and I'll say innovative leadership -- to really push this forward."

* * * * *

"There's nothing new about challenges with ownership, especially…in disenfranchised communities. So for some of us, we no longer want to see that as a barrier. What we want to do and what we're trying to do…is provide the capacity for these communities to actually be able to own. Because if we continue telling that story, these communities will never own anything. It's the same argument in procurement. It's the same argument in disadvantaged businesses not being able to participate. I just wanted to point that out at the end of the day, [Ownership Participation] has more benefits to communities in terms of bringing people out of poverty than a lot of other options that are easier to implement."

* * * * *

Developing a Continuum

Coming out of the discussion, there was significant interest in further developing an Ownership Participation model, but also an understanding of the practical challenges of implementing such a model and that a realistic approach would entail an evolution over time. Acknowledging this, working group members suggested framing the benefits models as a continuum, allowing communities to advance their engagement starting with simpler and easier to access models, building their understanding of how to “level” up over time.

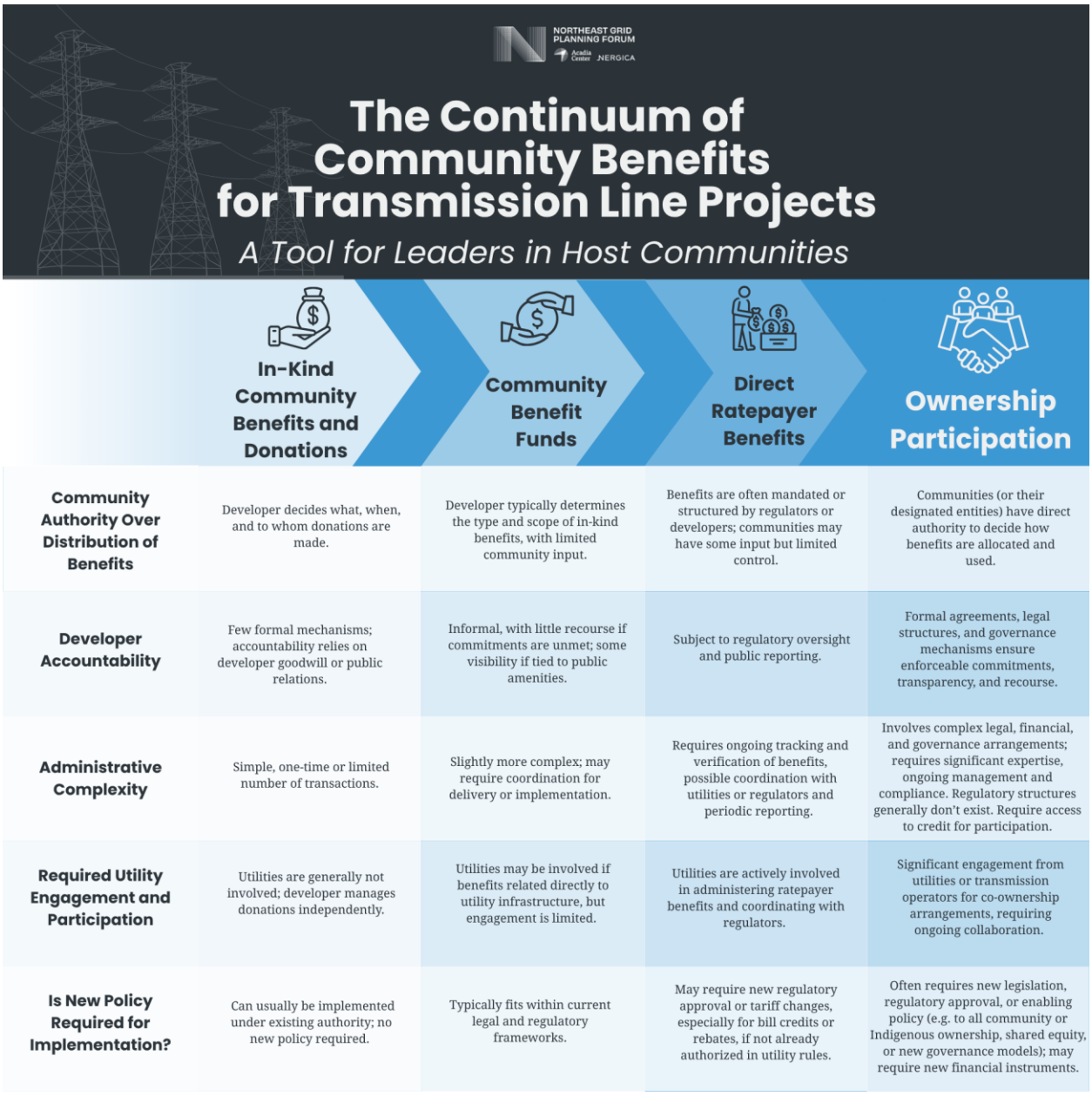
Based on this insight, the research team, alongside the working group, developed a continuum that visually and conceptually maps the spectrum of community benefits models. Rather than viewing each framework in isolation, the continuum illustrates how different approaches offer varying degrees of authority, accountability, and administrative complexity, and how communities can progress from simpler forms of engagement toward deeper, more influential participation.

In order to effectively break down silos and make these models a reality, co-convenors and working group participants recognize the need for broader public stakeholder engagement in future conversations, and opening up discussions to members of the energy infrastructure industry.

Presenting the models along a continuum helps community leaders understand:

- The tradeoffs of each approach
- The steps and supports needed to move toward greater ownership and influence
- How to match benefit models to their community’s unique needs, capacities, and aspirations

Figure 1. Continuum of Community Benefits Approaches



	In-Kind Community Benefits and Donations	Community Benefit Funds	Direct Ratepayer Benefits	Ownership Participation
Community Authority Over Distribution of Benefits	Developer decides what, when, and to whom donations are made.	Developer typically determines the type and scope of in-kind benefits, with limited community input.	Benefits are often mandated or structured by regulators or developers; communities may have some input but limited control.	Communities (or their designated entities) have direct authority to decide how benefits are allocated and used.
Developer Accountability	Few formal mechanisms; accountability relies on developer goodwill or public relations.	Informal, with little recourse if commitments are unmet; some visibility if tied to public amenities.	Subject to regulatory oversight and public reporting.	Formal agreements, legal structures, and governance mechanisms ensure enforceable commitments, transparency, and recourse.
Administrative Complexity	Simple, one-time or limited number of transactions.	Slightly more complex; may require coordination for delivery or implementation.	Requires ongoing tracking and verification of benefits, possible coordination with utilities or regulators and periodic reporting.	Involves complex legal, financial, and governance arrangements; requires significant expertise, ongoing management and compliance. Regulatory structures generally don't exist. Require access to credit for participation.
Required Utility Engagement and Participation	Utilities are generally not involved; developer manages donations independently.	Utilities may be involved if benefits related directly to utility infrastructure, but engagement is limited.	Utilities are actively involved in administering ratepayer benefits and coordinating with regulators.	Significant engagement from utilities or transmission operators for co-ownership arrangements, requiring ongoing collaboration.
Is New Policy Required for Implementation?	Can usually be implemented under existing authority; no new policy required.	Typically fits within current legal and regulatory frameworks.	May require new regulatory approval or tariff changes, especially for bill credits or rebates, if not already authorized in utility rules.	Often requires new legislation, regulatory approval, or enabling policy (e.g. to all community or Indigenous ownership, shared equity, or new governance models); may require new financial instruments.

Key Insights

Opportunity: Significant Interest in Ownership Participation Model

- There was strong overall interest among participants in ownership participation models, with many viewing them as a promising way to increase local control and deliver tangible benefits directly to communities.
- Several participants emphasized that ownership participation models offering direct ratepayer benefits- such as reduced utility bills or revenue sharing – would be especially valuable for communities facing poverty, as these benefits could provide meaningful and immediate economic relief.
- There was recognition that structuring ownership opportunities to ensure transparent and equitable distribution of financial returns could help build broader community support, particularly in under-resourced areas where economic impacts are most acutely felt.
- Many examples of real-world ownership participation models involve groups of Tribal or First Nations communities. In many cases, these communities may benefit from government-supported financial instruments and existing bodies that are able to speak on behalf of multiple communities. Non-Indigenous municipalities may need to form new intergovernmental alliances and raise funds through other means, as seen in the Alliance de l'énergie de l'Est case study example.

Challenge: Balancing Community Benefits with Ratepayer Affordability and Fairness

- There was concern that the costs of providing community benefits could be passed on to the broader ratepayer base, raising questions about affordability, fairness, and transparency.
- By contrast, comparing the cost of proactive community investment with the high cost of project delays, legal challenges and opposition, suggests upfront investment in host communities could be a cost-saving approach over the long term.

Opportunity: Need for Actionable Frameworks

- Viewing the models as a continuum would recognize that many communities are not practically able to engage in ownership participation models today and some of the less complex approaches are more realistic in the near-term, but creates a pathway and a vision for communities to evolve toward ownership participation models over

the longer term while encouraging communities who are ready to innovate around the ownership participation model.
- Participants emphasized the need for clear pathways that enable communities to move from basic benefits toward deeper forms of participation such as investment and ownership.

Opportunity: Entities Distributing Benefits Hold Key Power in Negotiation and Accountability

- Power to allocate benefits can affect trust, transparency, and the perceived fairness of the entire process. The structure and authority of this entity can either empower communities or reinforce existing imbalances.
- Ensuring accountability and enforcement of benefit-sharing agreements emerged as a critical factor in long-term success.
- Ultimately, the effectiveness of benefit-sharing models depends not only on the terms negotiated but on the distribution of power and accountability throughout the lifespan of the project. Ownership participation models hold significant potential to achieve this outcome.

Opportunity: Innovative Structures Can Advance Equity and Respect Sovereignty

- Ownership approaches can help ensure that diverse community interests are represented fairly and that the unique legal and cultural status of Tribal/Indigenous Nations is recognized in negotiations.
- Participants highlighted that such models not only improve the chances of successful negotiations, but also foster trust and long-term partnership between communities and developers.
- Ownership can ensure a project reflects values of the community.

Challenge: Ownership Participation Faces Significant Barriers

- Legal, regulatory, and financial barriers make ownership participation challenging, particularly for communities with limited resources or experience with utility ownership.
- Many communities lack sufficient access to capital and technical resources needed to secure an ownership stake, limiting their ability to share in long-term benefits and exercise meaningful decision-making power. Public financing mechanisms, such as

those being explored in a separate initiative of Acadia Center and Clean Air Task Force, have the potential to help bridge this gap.

Challenge: Integrating Community Benefits and Ownership into Investor and Developer Business Models

- Traditional project financing and developer business models are often not structured to accommodate community ownership or the cost of delivering material community benefits, which would create a reluctance among investors and developers to embrace these approaches.
- Addressing this challenge will require more focused engagement and dialogue with the developer and investor community about aligning incentives and integrating community participation, benefits, and ownership into financial models.

Opportunity: A Leadership Mindset Can Alter the Conversation

- Case studies demonstrate that forward-thinking, respectful, and innovation-minded leadership, especially from developers and utilities, can create opportunities for mutual benefit. When leaders at the highest levels demonstrate respect for community values and autonomy, it fosters local trust and can enhance productive dialogue and receptivity.

Topics of Future Inquiry:

1. Broader Stakeholder Engagement Around Benefit Distribution Mechanisms:

- This analysis was limited to stakeholders representing consumer and community interests. Broader stakeholder engagement is needed to more fully assess the interest in and clearly document public perception of the most equitable, desired models for distributing benefits, and whether there are models that are more appropriate for certain communities or under certain circumstances.
- How can accountability and enforcement be strengthened under all benefits models to ensure benefits reach intended recipients?

2. Ratepayer Impact Analysis

- What are the long-term cost implications for ratepayers under different benefit-sharing models?
- How can cost allocation be structured to balance fairness, affordability, and political acceptability across host communities, local ratepayers, and ratepayers at large?

3. Practical Supports for Community Ownership

- Conduct an in-depth review of successful ownership participation models and identify common challenges, effective solutions and shared insights on the path toward developing a replicable policy framework.
- What technical, legal, and financial supports are needed to help communities – especially Indigenous and under-resourced communities – move toward ownership participation?
- What best practices exist for building community capacity and overcoming regulatory hurdles?

4. Power and Governance Structures

- How do different governance structures influence power dynamics between developers, communities, and other stakeholders?
- What roles can intermediary entities play to even out the power dynamics?
- Can we identify governance approaches that are practical for communities and will simplify community ownership participation?

Appendix

Snapshot Table: Representative Case Studies by Benefits Approach

To provide a clear foundation for Part 2 of the project, the following table organizes the case studies and literature review findings according to the four identified models of community benefits. This structured overview highlights how each model has been applied in practice, offering a comparative lens to inform further analysis and discussion.

Each entry includes:

- A description of the benefit and available information about how many communities received the benefit and other impacts
- The model that researchers identified as driving the benefit (see appendix for more information)
- The project or initiative that the benefit was achieved for
- The country where the benefit was achieved
- A link to the research in the appendix where you can learn more about the benefit and project

While the examples primarily focus on transmission projects, there are some from other types of projects that the researchers believed offered valuable insights.

Ownership Participation

Benefit	Model	Project/Initiative	Country	Page
Training programs developed in partnership with local institutions to ensure long-term job opportunities in the energy sector for Indigenous workers	Workforce and economy; ownership (tribal)	Wataynikaneyap Power (transmission project)	Canada	51
Creation of employment and training programs to ensure project employs Indigenous workers	Workforce and economy; Ownership (tribal)	East-West Tie (transmission project)	Canada	54
Creation of a cooperative of over 1,400 households and businesses (Vineyard Power)	Ownership (non-tribal)	Vineyard Wind (offshore wind project)	U.S.	47

facilitates an investigation of potential ownership stake				
40% equity stake in transmission line to seven Indigenous communities	Ownership (tribal)	Fort McMurray West (transmission project)	Canada	38
Tribe becomes partial owner of transmission infrastructure in exchange for utility obtaining rights of way to corridor on Reservation land	Ownership (tribal)	Southern California Edison (transmission upgrades)	U.S.	48
Co-ownership of a transmission line by a Tribal council and utility	Ownership (tribal)	CHPE (transmission project)	Canada	48
Alliance, made up of 209 communities from one First Nation and 16 municipalities, which serves a shareholder role in the project, distributes profits among communities, and gives Tribes voice in development on ancestral land	Ownership (tribal and non-tribal); workforce and economy; environmental benefits	Alliance de l'Est (shareholder in multiple wind farms in Eastern Quebec)	Canada	49
Project developed by a partnership of 24 First Nations, utility, and private investors	Ownership (tribal)	Wataynikaneyap Power (transmission project)	Canada	51
Development of limited liability partnership (LLP) that represents six First Nations and has a 20% ownership stake in project	Ownership (tribal)	East-West Tie (transmission project)	Canada	54

Direct Ratepayer Benefits/Bill Credits

Benefit	Model	Project/Initiative	Country	Page
$140 million rate relief fund, developed in partnership with utility, to be applied to customer utility bills over time	Rate adjustments or assistance; donation-based	NECEC (transmission project)	U.S.	60

Transmission rates customer credit, or one-time credit on customer utility bills to make up for costs of new construction in previous bills	Rate adjustments or assistance; donation-based	NECEC (transmission project)	U.S.	60
Host Community Benefit Program that mandates bill costs to utility customers to make up for impacts of new construction*	Rate adjustments or assistance	NY Public Service Commission program for multiple projects (clean energy facilities)	United States	61
Rate mitigation plan to manage rate increases related to the costs of a specific project through cost-sharing model *	Rate adjustments or assistance	Muskrat Falls (hydroelectricity and transmission)	Canada	61
Electricity bill discounts of up to £2,500 over 10 years for homes within 500 meters of new or upgraded electricity transmission infrastructure*	Rate adjustments or assistance	Great Britain's Plan for Change	Great Britain	62

* These benefits were achieved because of existing laws, mandates, or government programs.

Community Benefit Funds

Benefit	Model	Project/Initiative	Country	Page
Funding for a city's various programs, including public safety programs (such as the Youth Academy at the police department)	Donation-based	Chevron (oil refinery)	U.S.	42
Funding for community-chosen initiatives, including new bike paths, hiking trails, skating rink, and splash pad in communities along the transmission line	Donation-based	Hydro-Québec IEP (program that applies to multiple transmission projects)	Canada	43
Distribution of grants to community foundations selected by developer; foundations were across	Community-led and –designed grant process	Northern Plains Connector (transmission project)	U.S.	54

multiple communities and had decision-making power for how to spend funds				
Payments to schools in multiple communities through PILOT process	Workforce and economy	SOO Green Link; CHPE (transmission projects)	U.S.	50
As much as £200,000 worth of funding per km of overhead electricity cable and £530,000 per substation for community programs including sports clubs and educational programs*	Donation-based	Great Britain's Plan for Change	Great Britain	62
Payments to multiple communities over time through the PILOT process	Workforce and economy	SOO Green Link; CHPE (transmission projects)	U.S.	50
Statewide green economy fund focused on low-income workforce training for transitioning out of fossil fuel jobs	Donation-based; workforce and economy	CHPE (transmission project)	U.S.	41
New infrastructure for fire protection and water supply in communities along the transmission line	Donation-based	Hydro-Québec IEP (program that applies to multiple transmission projects)	Canada	43
Funding and construction of new infrastructure, such as walking paths, along a railroad right of way	Co-location	SOO Green Link (transmission project)	U.S.	44
Broadband internet cables across multiple communities during transmission development and fund to help rural communities construct broadband infrastructure	Co-location; donation-based	Central Maine Power (utility developing multiple transmission projects)	U.S.	45
Fund for mitigating adverse environmental impacts as the result of a project*	Environmental benefits	NY Public Service Commission program for multiple projects	U.S.	63

		(transmission projects)		
$117 million in funding over the course of 35 years for environmental protection, with a specific focus on community initiatives in disadvantaged communities	Environmental benefits	CHPE (transmission project)	U.S.	64
Hundreds of millions in funding to wetland habitat restoration	Environmental benefits; donation-based	New England Clean Power Link (transmission project)	U.S.	64
Funding of wetland offsets: for every hectacre lost in construction, three hectacres restored or enhanced elsewhere	Environmental benefits	MMTP (transmission project)	Canada	64
Creation of trust fund to acquire 96.4 hectacres of private land and designate it as Crown lands to compensate for loss of Crown lands traditionally used by Indigenous communities	Environmental benefits; donation-based	MMTP (transmission project)	Canada	64

* These benefits were achieved because of existing laws, mandates, or government programs.

In-Kind Community Benefits/Donations

Benefit	Model	Project/Initiative	Country	Page
Development of a climate-focused STEM lab at a Boys & Girls Club	Donation-based	CHPE (transmission project)	U.S.	41
New nature center at a park	Donation-based	CHPE (transmission project)	U.S.	41
Scholarships to one city's public high school students to pursue higher education	Donation-based	Chevron (oil refinery)	U.S.	42

Provisions for damages to areas important to fishermen	Donation-based; environmental benefits	AT&T (cable line)	U.S.	42
Planting of pollinator plants in the same corridor as transmission line, in partnership with local environmental nonprofit	Co-location; environmental benefits	Xcel Energy (utility developing multiple transmission projects)	U.S.	45

Other Examples of Benefits from Community-Developer Engagement

Benefit	Model	Project/Initiative	Country	Page
$85 million in project-related contracts awarded to Indigenous businesses	Workforce and economy	Fort McMurray West (transmission project)	Canada	45
Prioritization of local businesses owned by women, veterans, and BIPOC in procurement practices	Workforce and economy	Consumers Energy (transmission project)	U.S.	51
Preference for local workers for construction of project, included in a legal clause	Workforce and economy	NECEC (transmission)	U.S.	51
100% union workforce, with emphasis on recruiting from apprenticeship programs and underrepresented constituencies	Workforce and economy	Consumers Energy (transmission project)	U.S.	51
Incorporation of a telecommunications line with transmission line to better connect transmission and manage power outages	Co-location	Fort McMurray West (transmission project)	Canada	45
Equipment installed to reduce the project's greenhouse gas emissions	Donation-based	Chevron (oil refinery)	U.S.	42
Routing projects to avoid specific ecological areas	Environmental benefits;	MMTP (transmission project)	Canada	64

	operational changes			
Avoiding construction during frozen seasons to reduce soil compaction	Environmental benefits; operational changes	MMTP (transmission project)	Canada	64
Limited herbicide use to reduce soil compaction	Environmental benefits; operational changes	MMTP (transmission project)	Canada	64
Creation of a committee about impacts of project in area used for fishing, made up of local fishermen who were compensated for participation	Donation-based; environmental benefits	AT&T (cable line)	U.S.	42
Developer decides to install cables underground or underwater in response to community feedback	Operational changes	CHPE; SOO Green Link (transmission projects)	U.S.	48
Transmission line route chosen or updated based on community feedback	Operational changes; Co-location	Clean Line; Northern Plains Connector (transmission projects)	U.S.	57
Transmission line rerouted to avoid disruption of Indigenous lands and sensitive ecosystems and species	Operational changes; environmental benefits	Micoua–Saguenay (transmission project)	Canada	58
Construction suspended during culturally and economically significant period for community	Operational changes; environmental benefits	Micoua–Saguenay (transmission project)	Canada	58

Complete Literature and Case Study Review

Introduction

Overview of project importance and NGPF

This paper encompasses a literature review of existing practices for community benefits administered for transmission projects, both in the United States and in Canada, that its authors have identified as representative of facilitating noteworthy community-developer relationships. This paper was funded as part of the Northeast Grid Planning Forum Project (NGPF)[3], an initiative advancing a framework on cross-regional cooperation between the United States and Canadian grids. By examining ways that communities can benefit from prospective transmission projects, both inter-regionally and in each respective country, our literature review aims to provide tangible research and ideas to aid community leaders in a conversation about how to ensure communities are at the front of any project development processes. After an extensive literature review, the following models have been developed for how community benefits can be disbursed from transmission projects, which will be explained in depth in this paper: eminent domain, donation, co-location, ownership, workforce and economic benefits, environmental-benefits, community-led design, operational changes, and rate changes/relief. These nine models are explained by including case studies from the United States and Canada, as well as building off the extensive work of researchers examining community benefits in the field of clean energy and transmission. This paper also includes a review of existing guiding principles on best practices for engagement for ensuring that as community benefits models are developed, the process from cradle to grave gives communities a voice in a meaningful way.

Communities' benefits for engagement

First, it is important to address existing practices in community engagement. The truth is that the ultimate models for transmission benefits are null without the proper outreach and engagement with communities to begin with. Notably, when it comes to framing principles for community engagement, the term "community benefit agreements" is lacking in the literature for transmission projects. However, this can be taken as an opportunity to frame even better processes for the communities

[3] https://acadiacenter.org/the-northeast-grid-planning-forum-uniting-north-americans-for-our-net-zero-future/

involved in these projects. In the past, community benefit agreements have received criticism for being transactional and for being too focused on workforce issues as opposed to other benefits. As such, transmission projects need not be bound by the typical literature of community benefits agreements. An opportunity exists to think more expansively in the context of transmission – this means co-creating benefits processes with communities, ensuring these processes are community led, and that communities can see tangible benefits in the form of infrastructure buildout/physical benefits that can be possible with transmission buildouts as opposed to other projects.

Existing best practices say that money and resources should be invested early in the actual framework for outreach to communities, rather than waiting for formal permitting processes. For instance, the Champlain Hudson Power Express project (CHPE) is a transmission project that was designed to deliver clean energy from Canada into New York City. CHPE focused on investing in disadvantaged communities affected by the line by setting up an official framework within an agreement[4]. In this framework, CHPE used New York's definition of "disadvantaged communities", and abided by stakeholder requirements of key convenings / stakeholder work that would take place, such as:

- Consistent convenings, stakeholder meetings including local stakeholders and public officials' involvement to know how the project is going with the objective of seeing how benefits evolve to help the community. This also aligns with Columbia University's CBA best practice principle of involving local officials or at least one public entity in CBA negotiations, even if they lack permitting authority[5].
- Forming advisory, working groups with members from the communities.
- Maintenance of a website and channels where residents and communities can submit questions and stay apprised of progress. This recommendation also aligns with other best practices that include clear website maintenance for transmission, especially taking into consideration that alternate routes of way were considered and why[6].
- Documenting input and feedback received from engagement activities to inform benefits that later get developed.

[4] {903ED3B5-BC2F-430C-8F4E-9E3A4B1C7B3F}.pdf

[5] https://scholarship.law.columbia.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1207&context=sabin_climate_change

[6] https://www.cleanenergygrid.org/portfolio/report-the-pace-of-trust-a-framework-by-community-voices-for-advancing-transmission/

Overall, New York state had a unique regulatory setup that mandated CHPE to enter into a legal agreement under the Renewable Energy Certificate Purchase and Sale Agreement in order to conduct this engagement. Although not all places will have this regulatory set up, there are many lessons to be learned from consistent and well-planned engagement in the transmission space. This example shows what community benefits planning and resource investment specifically looks like for a transmission project.

Additionally, there is existing literature on best practices for conducting CBAs and siting engagement, both in transmission and non-transmission projects. Some key advice for developers found in this literature includes:

- Working with existing community knowledge – utilizing trusted messengers and minimizing the number of excessive contacts the community must have with the developer, as well as hiring local outreach firms who specialize in the knowledge about that community. (Columbia University, Americans for a Clean Energy Economy). On top of this, ensure inclusive and multi-lingual and multi-modal communication is taking place in all stakeholder meetings and interactions (community-based organizations can be compensated for the work and inclusive outreach they could be contracted to do on a developer's behalf).
    - Example: Vineyard Wind hired a full-time energy outreach specialized trained in Portuguese to speak to residents in the community, as that was the dominant language in the area.[7]
    - Example: working credibly with trusted local philanthropy, the Northern Plain Connector line established high levels of trust and grant disbursement in the community.[8]
- Communication – make sure land agents are well trained for transmission and that they abide by a clear code of conduct and approach all local conversations from a place of asking questions and addressing impacts rather than condescension and buying support. (Columbia University, Americans for a Clean Energy Economy)
- Outreach – Meet 1:1 with neighbors, prioritize outreach to the groups most engaged with the issues at hand and have discrete concerns. Don't just meet with supporters. Wait to negotiate specifics until benefits of the project are reasonably well defined. (Columbia University)

[7] https://www.vineyardpower.com/news/blog-post-title-one-dcf76-3jh4j-sb664-r5emt

[8] https://www.wri.org/snapshots/community-benefits-snapshot-north-plains-connector-transmission-line-community-engagement

    - Even if pursuing right of way transmission project development or another pathway that might not require the same level of engagement with landowners, it is a best practice to still voluntarily reach out to landowners, host community meetings, and potentially provide voluntary payments as a gesture of goodwill.
    - Hire tribal cultural specialists and conduct voluntary tribal engagement through places where your line crosses, if applicable (GPI).
- Benefits – negotiate in tandem with taxes and local revenue numbers, especially for transmission. Developers should ensure they are well-versed in this information. Emphasize the ability for locally owned generation to also connect to the line and the benefit that would bring to the community (Columbia University, GPI).
    - In a survey conducted of 39 commissioners across the US, less than 1/5 of county commissioners interviewed knew or felt confident that they could find out expected tax revenues from transmission development[9]. This highlights a big issue area developers must consider.
    - Additionally, ensure investments are unconditional – local investments should not be tied to the success of a project.
- Use measurable metrics connected to project outcomes, like SMART goals, with regular reporting (RMI CBA Catalog).
    - Example: Pacificorp tracking and sharing public goals.[10]
    - Example: the developer can partner with a third-party organization to ensure accountability and external tracking of any goals they agree to. This is reflected in the formal agreement between Portland General Electric & the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs.[11]

Scope

Overall, the scope of this paper examines case studies and transmission projects from the United States and Canada. The authors also focus on new project construction as opposed to

[9] https://betterenergy.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Lessons-learned-Along-the-Road-to-Transmission-Deployment.pdf

[10] https://www.pacificorp.com/content/dam/pcorp/documents/en/pacificorp/energy/ceip/CEIP_CBIs_Report_Card.xlsx

[11] « The project owners will work with PDXO, a local organization with over a decade of experience in community engagement, to seek input from a coalition of community stakeholders. As part of this process, the project will use methods and tools, including surveys and focus groups, to track, evaluate, and measure engagement performance, as well as refine methods to achieve intended outcomes". Find GRIP Project here: Grid Resilience and Innovative Partnerships Program (GRIP); DE-FOA-0002740 | netl.doe.gov

rebuilds or asset condition projects, specifically because the rebuilds/upgrades focus on projects that had existing engagement and approval.

Models

Eminent Domain (Control)

The first model the authors have chosen to address is essentially the "control" or the base case for what happens if no community benefits are included in a transmission project. The no model example encompasses eminent domain, which is a process that exercises a legal right to "take or expropriate private property for public use…[and] can also be used to take an easement for utilities, such as sewer and cable lines, that must cross private property".12 In the context of transmission, publicly regulated utilities are able to use the power of eminent domain to garner the easements they need to construct their project. Merchant transmission operators can petition to the state for approval to also receive the power of eminent domain to build their transmission projects. There are countless examples of this in the United States, and this process typically happens if property owners do not voluntarily acquiesce (or if negotiations go poorly) with the utility company hoping to use their land for the project. This model is not in the best interest of communities.

Canada

The Bipole III transmission project, developed by Manitoba Hydro, stands as a significant example of eminent domain in the construction of energy infrastructure in Canada. This high-voltage direct current (HVDC) transmission line covers a distance of 1,384 km, connecting the Keewatinohk converter station near Gillam in northern Manitoba to the Riel converter station east of Winnipeg. Operating at 500 kV, Bipole III has a transmission capacity of 2,000 MW and was designed to enhance reliability and capacity of Manitoba's electrical grid [13,14]. Despite its strategic importance, the project

[12] https://www.consumernotice.org/legal/eminent-domain/
[13] https://www.mortenson.com/projects/bipole-iii-project?utm
[14] https://www.hydro.mb.ca/corporate/regulatory-affairs/projects/#bipole3

became controversial due to land acquisition disputes, leading Manitoba Hydro to invoke expropriation laws to secure necessary rights-of-way [15,16,17].

From the outset, Manitoba Hydro sought to negotiate voluntary agreements with approximately 250 private landowners to acquire easements for the transmission corridor [16,18.] While many landowners agreed, others refused, citing concerns over land devaluation, environmental impacts, and interference with agricultural activities [19]. Farmers in southern Manitoba feared that the placement of the transmission line would disrupt their farming operations [20], while Indigenous communities raised concerns about the project's impact on their traditional territories and the lack of meaningful consultation [21,22]. As resistance mounted, Manitoba Hydro, under the Manitoba Hydro Act, exercised its legal right to expropriate land bypassing further negotiations [15,16,19,23].

The decision to use eminent domain provoked widespread protests and legal challenges [15,24]. Several landowners contested the expropriation process, arguing that the compensation offered was inadequate and that alternative routing options were not properly explored. Some farmers voiced concerns about biosecurity risks, as the construction of the transmission line would require frequent access to private farmland. Meanwhile, Indigenous leaders criticized the lack of meaningful engagement and failure to respect their land rights. Despite these challenges, the government of Manitoba justified the use of expropriation, emphasizing that Bipole III was a critical infrastructure project necessary for long-term energy security. Although opposition persisted, the transmission project moved forward and construction was completed in 2018. However, the controversy surrounding the forced land acquisitions

[15] https://www.manitobacooperator.ca/news-opinion/news/local/landowners-opposed-to-manitoba-hydro-bipole-iii-vulnerable-to-expropriation/
[16] https://www.brandonsun.com/local/2014/11/25/manitoba-hydro-to-begin-expropriating-land-for-bipole-iii-hydro-transmission-line
[17] https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/659436/hydro-manitoba-manifestation-projet-bipole-winnipeg
[18] https://www.tdworld.com/overhead-transmission/article/20964921/ninety-percent-of-bipole-iii-route-secured?utm
[19] https://environment.probeinternational.org/2015/01/21/an-abuse-of-power/?utm
[20] https://www.realagriculture.com/2016/02/manitoba-farmers-standoff-bipole-power-line-construction/?utm
[21] https://web.archive.org/web/20211004222800/https://winnipegsun.com/2015/01/14/first-nation-denied-bipole-iii-delay
[22] https://web.archive.org/web/20211004215213/https://www.rcinet.ca/en/2015/01/26/indigenous-sapotaweyak-cree-nation-blockades-against-hydro-electric-line/
[23] https://www.manitobacooperator.ca/news-opinion/news/local/desperate-hydro-expropriation-tactics/?utm
[24] https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/659436/hydro-manitoba-manifestation-projet-bipole-winnipeg

left a lasting impact on how transmission projects engage with affected communities [25].

While expropriation remains a legal tool for infrastructure development in Canada under both federal and provincial expropriation laws, it is increasingly seen as a last resort. Recent trends in energy infrastructure projects emphasize engagement and collaboration with impacted communities rather than forced land acquisitions. This shift is particularly evident in transmission projects that intersect Indigenous lands, where negotiated agreements, equity partnerships, and revenue-sharing models are now preferred approaches.

For instance, the Fort McMurray West 500-kV Transmission Project incorporated extensive Indigenous engagement, resulting in seven Indigenous communities acquiring a 40% equity stake, ensuring long-term economic benefits while maintaining their land rights.[26]

Similarly, Hydro One's First Nations Equity Partnership Model now offers Indigenous communities a 50% equity stake in all large-scale capital transmission line projects exceeding $100 million, including the Waasigan Transmission Line Project, which provides direct economic opportunities for nine First Nations in northwest Ontario. [27]

Additionally, the Wataynikaneyap Power Project, a First Nations-led initiative, is developing a 230 kV transmission line to provide grid access to remote Indigenous communities, demonstrating how collaborative ownership participation models are reshaping energy infrastructure development in Canada.[28]

[25] http://www.cecmanitoba.ca/hearings/biopole-III-mb-hydro/doc/FinalReport/FINAL_WEB_Bipole_III_Transmission_Project_WEB3.pdf
[26] https://www.bennettjones.com/Blogs-Section/Indigenous-Ownership-in-Energy-Infrastructure?utm
[27] https://www.hydroone.com/about/corporate-information/major-projects/waasigan
[28] https://link2build.ca/news/articles/2024/september/two-more-first-nations-energized-by-wataynikaneyap-power-transmission-system/

Donation

When it comes to community benefits agreements, there are countless examples of contracts in which developers agree to give donations to the host community of the project as a benefit. There's a lot of variety in the types of donations that are available: they can be recurring/annual donations that the developer agrees to, indexed based on time (i.e. the donation decreases slightly with every year or decade), one-time payments, or more. The donation structure can be in the form of a community fund geared towards a specific cause, a grant, a donation line item in the contract that's specific to a specific organization/topic/theme, or otherwise structured. The National Renewable Energy Lab conducted a literature review of CBAs for wind, and they found the following categories to be most popular for benefit types, in descending order29: education, community support/services, public safety, history/culture/events, emergency relief, environment, infrastructure, health, recreation, agriculture, economic development, veterans, and utility related. It is notable that in most instances with the donation benefits model, there is an "amalgamation" of different donation types and categories being considered by the developer; it is rarely just one type of donation that is focused on. These benefits can be provided to the community itself, or with important stakeholder groups within the community, such as the fishing industry, environmental groups, and environmental justice advocates.

U.S.

The literature is rich in donation examples, from transmission to other projects.

Transmission examples

Champlain Hudson Power Express (CHPE) announced[30] $9 million in funding for community engagement, including the construction of a new Nature Center on

[29] https://www.nrel.gov/docs/fy23osti/85185.pdf

[30] https://chpexpress.com/news/champlain-hudson-power-express-announces-financial-close/

Randall's Island, as well as a new climate-focused STEM lab at the Boys & Girls Club in Queens. CHPE has also created a $40 million green economy fund focused on low-income workforce training for transitioning out of fossil fuel jobs.[31]

The Clean Energy Connect line announced a variety of benefits for the local community that included a focus on workforce (including a commitment to give preference to hiring local workers), local county initiatives, the environment (including EVs and heat pumps), broadband Wi-Fi, education, low-income customers, and a creation of a fund for rate relief.[32]

Fossil fuel infrastructure and other non-transmission example(s)
Transmission projects can certainly find learnings in how linear infrastructure projects execute agreements. When constructing a new cable line in San Luis Obispo County, AT&T worked with the local fishermen to draw up a benefits agreement that gave funding towards causes important to them, like creating provisions for grant mitigation program and damages in the fishermen's' vicinity.[33] The contract also laid out $50,000 in advance for community engagement and for creating committees with fishermen representation to reach a negotiation agreement, which is a best practice identified by experts.

The City of Richmond and Chevron came to an agreement where Chevron's oil refinery would award annual payments that decrease over time, focused on greenhouse gas reduction program funding, scholarships, and funding public safety programs.[34]

Overview of donation examples broadly
Columbia University's database for CBAs[35], WRI's database for CBAs[36], RMI's community benefits catalogue[37] are all available resources to see types of donation agreements that have been drawn up.

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[31] https://chpexpress.com/environmental-benefits/
[32] https://climate.law.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/content/CBAs/NECEC%20Stipulation.pdf
[33] https://climate.law.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/content/CBAs/Cable%20Companies%20Agreement.pdf
[34] https://climate.law.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/content/CBAs/Richmond-Chevron%20Refinery.pdf
[35] https://climate.law.columbia.edu/content/community-benefits-agreements-database
[36] https://www.wri.org/project-agreements-across-us?webform_submission_value=Community+Benefits+Agreement&webform_submission_value_1=Transmission&webform_submission_value_2=All&webform_submission_value_3=All

[37] https://rmi.org/insight/rmis-community-benefits-catalog

Canada

With its Integrated Enhancement Program (IEP), Hydro-Québec strives to ensure that its power transmission facilities, including lines and substations, integrate seamlessly into their surroundings [38]. This program was applied to the 406.4 km-long 735 kV transmission lines installed between Chamouchouane and Bout-de-l'Île [39]. Numerous projects were funded by IEP along the transmissions line to compensate for its residual impact for the different communities. A bike path, landscaping, revitalization of municipal park, new infrastructure for fire protection and water supply system, splash pad, hike trail and skating ring are some examples of projects made possible with the funding of this program.

[38] https://www.hydroquebec.com/projects/iep.html
[39] https://www.hydroquebec.com/projects/iep/chamouchouane.html

Infrastructure/Co-Location

Transmission projects, which are linear and can span right-of-way corridors and other strategic locations, can open the door for communities to benefit from infrastructure or co-located benefits. For instance, broadband access is a need for many rural communities in the United States. By strategically designing transmission projects so that they have the capacity to be co-located with broadband infrastructure, the developer can deliver a tangible benefit to that community (if it is a priority for them). Similarly, as many transmission projects use right of way corridors (such as highways, railroads, etc.), there can be a unique opportunity to simultaneously build other infrastructure needed by the community as they construct the project. In a similar vein, pollination corridors can be established in the same corridor being used for a transmission project, and other unique co-located uses of transmission space can come to light during the community benefit negotiation process. It is notable that if using the right of way process, developers can site their transmission lines without mandating certain negotiations with landowner, and as such any community benefits negotiations and stakeholder meetings will need to take place in good faith / voluntarily.

U.S.

Co-location of infrastructure

The SOO Green Link HVDC Line secured a right of way corridor in Iowa along a railroad right of way. They took the extra step by hosting county-wide meetings voluntarily and securing private landowner consent with voluntary “good neighbor payments” as well as community grant compensation despite not needing to according to the laws of right of way. Municipalities asked SOO to fund and construct infrastructure in the railroad rights of way that they would not have been able to fund or construct easily otherwise, such as paving walkways in the town.

Broadband examples

Central Maine Power is utilizing its transmission development process to also co-locate broadband with communities with an investment of more than $250 million.[40] The cables will be constructed to provide additional fiber optic capacity to be compatible with broadband upgrades. The investment in broadband also includes a broadband fund from which money will be pulled to help rural communities construct the actual broadband infrastructure.

Pollinator corridors

Xcel Energy partnered with a local nonprofit, Great River Greening, to plant pollinators in the same corridor under its transmission lines.[41] This idea speaks to the broader concept of co-utilizing transmission corridors in strategic ways and pursuing right of way transmission development if possible and more amenable to community preference. Right of way can be utilized by transmission developers to co-build their projects along areas like highways, railroads, or places already dedicated for streamlined/public use. Working with communities on these transmission development options and being transparent with them can help communities feel more comfortable with this transmission buildout as opposed to greenfield construction.

Canada

Fort McMurray West

The Fort McMurray West 500-KV Transmission Project is a 508 km, 500 kV transmission line, designed to strengthen grid reliability and increase energy distribution in northern Alberta. Led by Alberta PowerLine (APL), a partnership between ATCO Electric Ltd. and Quanta Services, the project includes Transmission Line 12L41, a 400 km single-circuit 500-kV transmission line that connects AltaLink's 1241L line to the Livock 939S Substation. [42,43]

The project was developed with Indigenous engagement, with consultations involving 27 Indigenous communities over a three-year period. These discussions helped incorporate Indigenous perspectives into the planning and execution of the transmission line. As part of an Indigenous contracting strategy, approximately $85 million in contracts were awarded to Indigenous businesses, creating economic

[40] https://climate.law.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/content/CBAs/NECEC%20Stipulation.pdf
[41] https://corporate.my.xcelenergy.com/s/sustainability/pollinator-initiative
[42] https://electric.atco.com/en-ca/community/projects/fort-mcmurray-west-500-kv-transmission-project.html
[43] https://regulatorylawchambers.ca/2019-4-16-alberta-powerline-general-partner-ltd-fort-mcmurray-west-500-kilovolt-transmission-project-decision-21030-d02-2017/

opportunities and supporting local employment. [44] Upon completion, seven Indigenous communities acquired a 40% equity stake in the transmission line, securing long-term financial benefits and direct participation in Alberta's energy sector. [45]

To reinforce Alberta's strategic telecommunications infrastructure, an incorporation of a 13 km fiber-optic cable within Transmission Line 12L41 was proposed by ATCO Electric Ltd. As a part of the Brintnell Area Fibre Optic Project, this fiber-optic network links ATCO Electric's Brintnell 876S Substation to Transmission Line 12L41 [46]. By creating an interconnection between two existing communication facilities, this initiative significantly enhances the telecommunications network, increasing ATCO's capacity to manage services during planned and unplanned outages and emergencies.

Approved by the Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC), the integration of fiber-optic cable into Transmission Line 12L41 is aimed at expanding communication capacity, improving regional diversity, and strengthening the resilience of the communication system used to monitor and operate Alberta's transmission network [47,48].

[44] https://electric.atco.com/en-ca/community/projects/fort-mcmurray-west-500-kv-transmission-project.html?utm
[45] https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2019/09/23/1919021/0/en/Indigenous-Communities-Acquire-40-Per-Cent-Interest-in-Award-Winning-Alberta-PowerLine.html?utm
[46] https://regulatorylawchambers.ca/atco-electric-ltd-brintnell-area-fibre-optic-project-auc-decision-28472-d01-2023/
[47] ATCO Electric Ltd. Brintnell Area Fibre Optic Project November 24, 2023: 28472_Decision 28472-D01-2023 - Brintnell Area Fibre Optic Project_000047
48 Telecommunications Facilities Permit and Licence 28995-D01-2024: 28995 _Permit and Licence 28995-D01-2024-Fibre Optic Cable ELADFO 019

Ownership

Another way developers can deliver meaningful benefits to a community is to work with them to create an ownership framework in projects. Owning parts of a project allows the community to develop wealth-building opportunities and to express a degree of independence and future stake in the project. This is especially important in historically disadvantaged communities that have often shouldered the burden of hosting infrastructure in their neighborhoods without seeing long term financial benefits and ownership for themselves. It is notable that ownership participation models drastically differ between the United States and Canada, as well as between different entity types (i.e. Tribes versus municipalities versus cooperatives / community groups). Notably, Tribes in both the U.S.49 and Canada50 are self-governing.

Non-tribal ownership

Vineyard Wind Project[51]

The Vineyard Wind Project signed the first community benefit agreement for wind power in the United States in 2015. This project was developed off the shores of Martha's Vineyard. Richard Andre, an active Martha's Vineyard community member and founder of the organization Vineyard Power – which was the party to the community benefit agreement – innovatively crafted the organization through a cooperative model, which has allowed the community interests to be represented through the option for ownership by the organization. The organization has a membership base of over 1,400 households and businesses[52], and they conducted 90+ outreach events with ~5,000 community members just in the year 2023. The community benefits agreement itself includes the potential for the cooperative to "investigate opportunities…to finance, purchase, own, or take an equity position in up to 100MW of offshore wind capacity in the Lease Area so as to secure benefits to its members and residents of the Cape and Islands region, and/or investigate opportunities for Vineyard Power to otherwise secure for its members and residents

[49] https://www.pbpindiantribe.com/government/a-sovereign-nation/
https://bctreaty.ca/2023/02/21/what-is-self-government/

[51] https://www.vineyardpower.com/news/blog-post-title-one-dcf76-3jh4j-sb664-r5emt

[52] ld.

of the Cape and Islands region benefits and values of offshore wind capacity...".[53] In situations where municipal or county ownership might be tricky due to government restrictions or limitations on how money can flow, establishing a cooperative like this is a model for ownership the local community can take part in.

Tribal ownership

Morongo Tribe, U.S.[54]

The Morongo Tribe in California became the first Native American Tribe approved as a participating transmission owner in 2021. When the utility Southern California Edison (SCE) needed to conduct upgrades and replace circuits across a 48-mile corridor that touched Reservation land, SCE and Morongo worked together on an agreement. In exchange for SCE receiving rights of way to some aspects on the Reservation land, the Tribe became a partial owner of some of the transmission infrastructure. The Tribe received the ability to "lease part of the project's transfer capability in return for payment of a pro rata percentage of the entire project cost"; which also benefitted SCE, since it meant they didn't have to fund the project entirely. FERC was involved in this process, and Morongo also officially joined the California Independent System operator as a transmission owner under an LLC.

Canada

Hertel-New York interconnection line project

In the CHPE project to supply renewables energy to New-York from Quebec, Hydro-Québec and the Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke are co-owners of the Hertel line. This 58 km, 400 kV underground transmission line passes through the Mohawk territory of Kahnawà:ke, south of Montreal [55]. This is the first project in which Hydro-Québec share ownership of its transmission infrastructure with a First Nation. Discussions began in 2019 and an agreement was signed in April 2024. The Mohawk Council will possess between 10 to 49% according to their contribution [56]. Hydro-Québec will oversee the operation and the maintenance.

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[53]https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57797a98414fb50acf42515d/t/579b845229687f6efd779504/1469809746655/Community+Benefits+Agreement+Summary.pdf

[54] https://morongonation.org/news/morongo-becomes-first-native-american-tribe-to-be-approved-as-a-participating-transmission-owner-in-nation/

[55] https://news.hydroquebec.com/en/press-releases/2067/mohawk-council-of-kahnawake-and-Hydro-Québec-sign-hertelnew-york-line-agreements/

[56] https://www.ledevoir.com/societe/811184/Hydro-Québec-mohawks-associent-exporter-electricite-vers-new-york

Alliance de l'Est

Formed in 2014, Alliance de l'Est ensures the participation of communities in wind farms in Eastern Quebec [57]. With 209 communities from 16 municipalities and the First Nation Wolastoqiyik Wahsipekuk, the Alliance plays a shareholder role and distributes the profits in the municipalities. As a member of the Alliance, the First Nation Wolastoqiyik Wahsipekuk has a direct voice for the development of the PPAW Wind Energy Centre that will be built on their ancestral land and be commissioned in 2026. As such, they can support social and environmental initiatives locally [58].

[57] https://alliance-est.ca/

[58] https://ppawwind.invenergy.com/

Workforce and Economy

Transmission projects can provide workforce and economic benefits which can be woven into agreements with host communities. Projects should consider providing detailed information on the local tax benefits they can provide communities. In the past, transmission projects have failed or been derided by local communities if they were not able to accurately articulate the financial benefit they would provide. Developers can source external economic analyses to find information on tax benefits and use this information to develop a payment plan with local entities to whom you pay tax, depending on the region. It is notable that a model for tax benefits can also include payments in lieu of taxes; not all states tax transmission lines, but the developer can still work out payment plans voluntarily in good faith with local agencies over a period. Payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT) payments are "Federal payments that help local governments offset losses in property taxes due to the existence of nontaxable Federal lands within their boundaries."59 Additionally, transmission developers can work with the community to understand their preferences on workforce benefits; including stating a preference for local workers in transmission development, integrating union labor, procuring parts from small/BIPOC/veteran/women-owned businesses, partnering with schools to create apprenticeship programs and funding, and more.

U.S.

SOO Green HVDC Link

SOO Green issued an economic impact study to evaluate what tax benefits their project would bring. They discovered the line would generate $14 million in tax benefits and they worked to negotiate local payments to taxing entities over the course of a 20-year projected period.[60] CHPE engaged in a similar process, negotiating

[59] https://www.doi.gov/pilt

[60] https://www.wri.org/snapshots/community-benefits-snapshots-soo-green-transmission-line-community-engagement

local agreements to provide tax obligations to entities like towns, schools, and villages[61]. Both SOO Green and CHPE utilized the "PILOT" process.Clean Energy Connect

The Clean Energy Connect included a unique clause expressing preference for local Maine workers within its contract, specifically stating that "all other factors being equal and consistent with applicable law and applicable labor agreements, NECEC LLC, and its contractors working on the construction of the NECEC will give preference to hiring Maine workers". [62] It is notable that in the past, the Clean Energy Connect project received fierce resistance from local Maine populations and was even rejected at first on the ballot. However, after a settlement was reached[63] and allowed the Clean Energy Connect project to continue, there emerged a clearer and moren elevated focus on the way Maine local communities can take part in and see the benefits stemming from the transmission line.

Consumers Energy

The Consumers Energy company transmission project committed to providing 100% union workforce for its transmission project.[64] The project also focused on recruiting from apprenticeship programs and underrepresented backgrounds in the workforce. This example speaks to a broader best practice in recruiting not just underrepresented populations in the workforce, but also in actively prioritizing small/women/veteran/BIPOC owned businesses in procurement practices if possible and considering impacts on the local community.

Canada

Wataynikaneyap Power Transmission Project

The Wataynikaneyap Power transmission project, which is distinguished by its Indigenous ownership, represents one of landmark initiatives in Canada's energy infrastructure. This high-voltage transmission project spans approximately 1,800 km aiming to connect 17 remote First Nations communities in Northern Ontario to the provincial electricity grid for the first time. This project was developed by

[61] https://rcbizjournal.com/2024/03/14/champlain-hudson-power-express-chpe-to-break-ground-in-rockland-county-for-new-underground-powerline/
[62] https://climate.law.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/content/CBAs/NECEC%20Stipulation.pdf
[63] https://www.mass.gov/news/dpu-approves-settlement-for-new-england-clean-energy-connect
[64] https://netl.doe.gov/sites/default/files/2024-01/GRID/Consumers%20Energy%20Company.pdf

Wataynikaneyap Power, a partnership between 24 First Nations and Fortis Inc as well as other private investors [65,66].

The 230 kV, 115 kV, 44 kV and 25 kV transmission lines were designed to replace costly and environmentally harmful diesel generation to ensure a stable and sustainable electricity supply for the participating communities. Before the project, these communities were originally powered by diesel generators which were unreliable, expensive and caused environmental risks. The transmission line project significantly improves the energy security and economic opportunities for the Indigenous communities in the region [66,67] .

Beyond its role in energy delivery, the project stimulates economic growth by creating new job opportunities, including an estimated 500 to 1,00 positions during the construction phase and generating nearly $900 million in socio-economic benefits. These include reducing greenhouse gas emissions and fostering competitive marketplaces across Northwestern Ontario [68,69,70]. Additionally, training programs were developed in partnership with local institutions to ensure long-term employment opportunities for Indigenous workers in the energy sector [71]. For example, since 2017, Opiikapawiin Services has organized 55 training programs integrating Indigenous knowledge and Land-Based Learning with modern Western training methodologies [65].

Although it has major benefits, the project encountered several challenges during its development including navigating regulatory approval[72], securing financing[73] and addressing logistical hurdles in remote regions [74]. Despite these challenges, the project's success demonstrates a viable model for large-scale, Indigenous-led energy projects that integrate economic development, workforce inclusion, and community engagement [70,72].

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[65] https://www.wataypower.ca/updates/wataynikaneyap-power-completes-construction-of-the-line-that-brings-light

[66] https://www.hatch.com/Projects/Energy/Wataynikaneyap-Power-Transmission-Project?utm

[67] https://www.wataypower.ca/updates/wataynikaneyap-power-completes-construction-of-the-line-that-brings-light

[68] https://mcmillan.ca/deals-cases/wataynikaneyap-cad1-9-billion-transmission-project/

[69] https://www.nwonewswatch.com/local-news/power-brings-equity-among-24-first-nation-communities-6156036

[70] https://www.wawataynews.ca/community/wataynikaneyap-power-announces-16-billion-funding

[71] https://www.wataypower.ca/project/job-training?utm

[72] https://www.torys.com/work/2018/12/wataynikaneyap-transmission-project?utm

[73] https://www.mccarthy.ca/en/insights/blogs/canadian-energy-perspectives/canadian-power-key-developments-2019-trends-watch-2020-wataynikaneyap-power-transmission-project

[74] https://www.wataypower.ca/project/background

The Wataynikaneyap Power Transmission Project was achieved in 2024, and its impact continues to be felt as it delivers economic stability and a reliable power supply to communities that had long been underserved. The project stands as a model for future transmission developments, proving that energy infrastructure can be designed to maximize workforce opportunities, economic benefits, and Indigenous participation while addressing long-standing energy disparities [75].

[75] https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1005489/construction-complete-on-largest-indigenous-led-energy-project-in-ontarios-history

Community-Led and Designed Grant Processes, Typically with Recurring/Long-Term Timelines - Rather than One-Time Grants

When it comes to grant disbursements, there is a way to co-create meaningful processes of funding with communities and ensure that their voices are at the front and center of the design process. Providing the funding for communities but allowing them to decide how it flows and to which topic areas is one model for ensuring community-centered benefit distribution. Notably, developers can still be involved in the logistics of assistance for fund disbursement and be looped into all conversations/committees, but they should trust that the community can drive the process and ultimate decision-making.

U.S.

Northern Plains Connector[76]

The Northern Plains Connector project took a unique approach in distributing grants in North Dakota and Montana, two of the states they're working in. Instead of giving a one-time donation or deciding the donation streams of the money themselves, Grid United (the developer) distributed money to the community foundations for them to take control of grant distribution. While Grid United helped create the committees which choose grantees and helped with technical assistance of the grants, they did not make the ultimate decision on who got the money – that was left to the community foundations to decide. Overall, this is a fascinating and critical model that allows for more community choice and freedom in grant distribution.

Canada

East-West Tie Transmission Project

The East-West Tie Transmission Project is a 450 km, 230 kV double circuit transmission line developed by NextBridge Infrastructure, connecting Thunder Bay and Wawa,

[76] https://www.wri.org/snapshots/community-benefits-snapshot-north-plains-connector-transmission-line-community-engagement

Ontario. Beyond strengthening Ontario's electrical grid, the project ensures long-term economic participation for Indigenous communities through structured partnerships and employment opportunities rather than a one-time compensation model.[77]

A significant aspect of this initiative is the Bamkushwada Limited Partnership (BLP), which represents six First Nations: Fort William, Michipicoten, Biigtigong Nishnaabeg, Pays Plat, Netmizaaggamig Nishnaabeg, and Red Rock Indian Band. Through this partnership, these Indigenous communities secured a 20% ownership stake in the project, guaranteeing them an ongoing financial interest in its operations. [78,79,80]

Further extending the long-term economic benefits, the project includes a three-year Indigenous Economic Benefits Plan, jointly developed by Hydro One and Supercom Industries, which focuses on[81]:

- Employment and training programs to integrate Indigenous workers into the project.
- Indigenous procurement strategies, ensuring that at least 25% of annual maintenance contract revenues are allocated to Indigenous businesses.
- Direct contracting opportunities, allowing Indigenous companies to benefit from maintenance and service agreements.

Additionally, the creation of a new entity, Maintenance LP, majority-owned by Supercom, provides Indigenous communities with continued financial participation in the transmission line's maintenance operations.[81]

During the construction phase, the project generated approximately $200 million in economic benefits, and an annual funding for community initiatives. Additionally, over 300 Indigenous workers were trained and employed, further solidifying its impact on workforce development.[82]

By securing sustained financial benefits through ownership, employment, and procurement opportunities, the East-West Tie Transmission Project represents a shift

[77] https://www.nexteraenergycanada.com/content/dam/neecanada/ca/en/pdf/east-west-tie-transmission/EWT-Fact-Sheet-FINAL.pdf?utm
[78] https://commdev.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/publications/FNMPC_Indigenous_Electricity_Infrastructure_Paper.pdf
[79] https://canadianindigenousinvestment.gigcmo.com/case-studies-east-west-tie-transmission-project
[80] https://www.tdworld.com/overhead-transmission/article/20970637/contracting-agreements-announced-for-ontario-east-west-tie-transmission-project
[81] NextBridge Infrastructure Request for Proposal: East-West Tie Line Project Maintenance Services Contract: Indigenous Economic Benefits Plan, 2020.
[82] https://newsroom.nexteraenergy.com/Transmission-line-continues-to-empower-Indigenous-communities-and-enhance-electricity-reliability-in-Ontario?l=12&utm

toward greater Indigenous economic inclusion in major infrastructure developments. Through this structured approach, Indigenous communities are empowered to directly manage financial benefits, fostering long-term economic resilience and self-determination.[83]

[83] https://www.redrocktownship.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/EWT-Newsletter_Winter2020-FINAL-web.pdf?utm

Operational changes

While currently routes are optimized for cost and social factors/community factors are typically treated as an afterthought84, it is possible when planning transmission to consider socially optimal and community-considerate routing and re-routing changes upfront. This means conducting a transmission process that is operationally sensitive to local landowners' needs, that considers undergrounding/underwatering lines seriously in response to stakeholder feedback, and general operational decisions that prioritize community relationships and social acceptability.

U.S.

Champlain Hudson Power Express (CHPE)

CHPE undergrounded and even underwatered some of their lines to respond to stakeholder feedback. This trend has been common with other transmission lines as well, such as the SOO Green HVDC link.[85]

Clean Line

The Clean Line transmission line selected its Northern Route based on stakeholder feedback, out of the three routes originally proposed.[86] This also increased potential compatibility with broadband access.

Northern Plains Connector

The Northern Plains Connector, developed by Grid United, took extra time with their outreach to adjust for operational changes and social acceptability in the communities they were working in. As a result, they saw enormous and positive engagement from landowners. Notably, Grid United goes door to door with landowners to get their voluntarily approval and sits down to speak with them individually to hear their needs and concerns; even though the route added about 50

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[84] https://betterenergy.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Lessons-learned-Along-the-Road-to-Transmission-Deployment.pdf

[85] https://www.utilitydive.com/news/transmission-buildout-stakeholders-community-niskanen/720132/

[86] https://www.utilitydive.com/news/accelerate-us-high-capacity-transmission-build-out-voluntary-strategic-co-location-rural-broadband/652661/

miles, which was a 14% increase in length, the flexibility of the route change increased support for the project.[87]

Canada

The Micoua-Saguenay Transmission Project

The Micoua–Saguenay transmission project, a 262 km, 735 kV high-voltage line developed by Hydro-Québec, was designed to reinforce the reliability of Quebec's electrical grid. Throughout its planning and consultation process, multiple environmental and social concerns were raised by Indigenous communities, local stakeholders, and environmental organizations. In response, Hydro-Québec implemented significant operational adjustments to mitigate these concerns.[88,89,90]

One of the primary concerns involved the potential disruption of Indigenous lands and sensitive ecosystems. To address this, Hydro-Québec rerouted the transmission line to bypass the proposed Brûlis du lac Frégate biodiversity reserve and key areas near Lac du Décès, which were highly valued by the Innu Nations of Pessamit, Mashteuiatsh, and Essipit. Additionally, the project was optimized to run through already disturbed habitats, minimizing new environmental fragmentation and reducing its impact on Indigenous land use. [91]

Another major issue was the impact on woodland caribou populations, particularly in the Pipmuacan region. To mitigate this, Hydro-Québec designed a 9 km segment where conductors would be elevated, allowing for the preservation of mature forests and facilitating caribou movement. [90,91]

In the Mont-Valin region, concerns were raised regarding the risk of extreme ice accumulation on transmission lines, which could lead to failures during harsh winter conditions. Hydro-Québec addressed this by rerouting the transmission line 1.7 km away from an existing corridor over a 12 km stretch, thereby avoiding high-altitude ice amplification zones. Furthermore, the project incorporated enhanced transmission

[87] https://www.wri.org/snapshots/community-benefits-snapshot-north-plains-connector-transmission-line-community-engagement
[88] https://www.hydroquebec.com/data/projets/ligne-micoua-saguenay/pdf/information-retenue-avril-2017.pdf?utm
[89] https://www.hydroquebec.com/data/projets/ligne-micoua-saguenay/pdf/bulletin-information-generale-mai-2016.pdf
[90] https://www.hydroquebec.com/data/projets/ligne-micoua-saguenay/pdf/micoua-saguenay-info-solution-retenue-cote-nord.pdf?utm
[91] https://www.environnement.gouv.qc.ca/evaluations/decret/2019/935-2019-rae.pdf

line materials designed to withstand significant ice loads, ensuring long-term system resilience.[90,91]

Hydro-Québec also implemented socially considerate adjustments in response to concerns from local communities. The company committed to suspending construction activities during peak moose hunting season, a significant cultural and economic period for Indigenous and local hunters. Additionally, Hydro-Québec engaged in direct consultations with outfitters and landowners to minimize disruptions to tourism and recreational activities.[90,91]

To further limit environmental impact, a new 110 km corridor was also created to maintain safe operational distances from other high-voltage lines, ensuring grid reliability while respecting community concerns.[90,91]

Beyond construction, Hydro-Québec integrated long-term monitoring programs, including a two-year invasive species management plan, to ensure that the project's environmental impact remains controlled and mitigated over time.[90,91]

By modifying the route, adopting advanced climate resilience measures, and aligning project execution with local concerns, Hydro-Québec has reinforced its commitment to sustainable and socially responsible energy infrastructure.

Rate Adjustments or Assistance

Transmission projects, given their intersections with federal transmission rate setting processes and their direct impact on ratepayers through the cost recovery process, can deliver benefits to ratepayers through relief funds and bill credits. It is notable that to deliver on any bill credits, there must be a partnership with the utility in some fashion to enable this (or the utility must be the transmission developer). It would not be possible for a merchant transmission developer working in isolation to affect residents' electric bills.

There are a few forms this model can take: the developer can establish a fund from which the utility can pull from and then transmit the funds to their respective rate classes, the developer could fund weatherization and efficiency improvements directly in the community, the developer can work to create a bill credit with the utility that would affect those in the specific rate classes affected by the transmission line, and/or the developer can offer a broader transmission relief rate credit that affects customer classes generally. This will also come down to the specific region and regional variations in rates.

U.S.

New England Clean Energy Connect Rate Relief Fund and Transmission Rates Customer Credit[92]

The New England Clean Energy Connect (NECEC) line established a rate relief fund and transmission rates customer credit. First, NECEC partnered with the utility, Central Maine Power Company (CMP), on both initiatives. For the fund, NECEC and CMP agreed to establish a $140 million rate relief fund from which CMP will pull into retail electricity customers' bills. Both parties agreed to contribute to the fund, with NECEC contributing more financially over the course of 40 years. It is notable that CMP also agreed to get involved in monetizing part of Hydro-Québec transferring of environmental attributes (essentially renewable energy credits) to add to the fund as

[92] https://climate.law.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/content/CBAs/NECEC%20Stipulation.pdf

well. From this fund, all general retail classes will be impacted positively with no differentiation between the classes.

As for the Transmission Rates Customer Credit, CMP agreed to grant a rate credit of approximately $1 million for customers in the regional and local network service transmission classes (which is terminology specific to the region of ISO-NE), since customer classes already had to pay to compensate the corridor needed for NECEC under FERC "Account 105 for Plant Held for Future Use"..

Regional network services as provided by ISO-NE to serve network load in the New England Area, and local network service charges are specific based on your geographical region within the larger ISO-NE domain; meaning the local service charges are variable on your bill depending on where you're located..

New York Bill Renewables Discount[93]

The New York Public Service Commission established a Host Community Benefit program that mandated large-scale clean energy facility owners pay a bill credit to all utility residential customers that live in the municipality affected by the project. Although this model applies for clean energy, it certainly is a transferable example to transmission infrastructure as well. It is notable, though, that this required a commission order and was not a voluntary process; regulatory/utility intervention and cooperation is needed here.

Canada

Muskrat Falls Generating Station

Developed by Nalcor Energy, the Muskrat Falls Generating Station and Transmission Project in Newfoundland and Labrador is a large-scale hydroelectric initiative designed to enhance the province's energy infrastructure. The project includes an 824 MW hydroelectric generating station on the lower Churchill River in Labrador and over 1,600 kilometers of transmission lines connecting the power station to the island of Newfoundland. While the project was intended to provide long-term energy security and economic benefits, its high construction costs led to concerns about significant electricity rate increases for consumers. [94,95]

To address this, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, in collaboration with Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro (NL Hydro), implemented a rate mitigation plan

[93] https://www.renewableenergypost.com/public-service-commission/new-york-state-public-service-commission-establishes-host-community-benefit-program/

[94] https://www.muskratfallsinquiry.ca/files/P-00136.pdf

[95] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muskrat_Falls_Generating_Station

to manage the project's debt and operational expenses without transferring excessive costs directly to ratepayers.

In 2021, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, in partnership with the federal government, introduced a $5.2 billion rate mitigation plan to prevent electricity prices from doubling rates. This support included restructuring the financing of the Lower Churchill Projects, which encompasses the Muskrat Falls Generating Station and associated transmission assets. The restructuring aimed to reduce the financial burden on the province and its residents.[96]

Under the final rate mitigation plan, domestic residential rate increases related to the Muskrat Falls project are capped at 2.25% annually until 2030. This measure ensures that consumers are protected from significant energy price hikes, maintaining a more stable and affordable electricity supply. [97]

The financial structure of this mitigation strategy reflects a cost-sharing model, where public funds and external revenue sources are utilized to offset the expenses of the transmission infrastructure. This approach demonstrates how government intervention and utility partnerships can effectively manage project costs while safeguarding consumers from substantial rate increases.

Other

Great Britain Plan for Change[98]

As part of Great Britain's Plan for Change for clean power by 2030, households within 500 meters of new or upgraded electricity transmission infrastructure will receive discounts of up to £2,500 over 10 years on their electricity bills. These credits are expected to largely benefit rural households. In addition to the credits for homes near infrastructure, the government is developing "community funds guidance," or guidelines to ensure communities benefit from hosting transmission, including funding projects such as sports clubs, educational programs, and leisure facilities. The government estimates "communities could get £200,000 worth of funding per km of overhead electricity cable in their area, and £530,000 per substation."

[96] https://www.renewableenergyworld.com/hydro-power/nl-government-finalizes-rate-mitigation-plan-for-824-mw-muskrat-falls-hydro-project/?utm

[97] https://nlhydro.com/hydro-joins-the-province-to-announce-final-rate-mitigation-plan/?utm_

[98] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/households-near-new-pylons-to-save-hundreds-on-energy-bills

Environmental Benefits

Transmission projects can provide benefits for environmental mitigation, environmental protection, and environmental justice. For environmental mitigation, this can mean providing funding and consideration for any adverse impacts that could result from the line and providing funding to compensate for this. This could also happen in parallel or in alignment with processes like CEQA and NEPA. It is also important to provide stakeholder input for the environmental mitigation priority areas, given impacts on businesses like fisheries/forestry/other local stakeholders that could be intimately involved with the surrounding environment. As for environmental benefits, this could take the form of providing funding for environmental causes like wetland protection, conservation, environmental education, and more depending on community interests. Environmental justice benefits could include funding intentional outreach to disadvantaged communities impacted by the development of the line and funding their initiatives of interest, such as community initiatives, shoreline/stabilization restoration, improving water quality, access to waterways, initiatives rectifying past environmental injustices generally, energy education, and more.

U.S.

NY Public Service Law

New York has an interesting statute under Public Service Law Section 139[99] that mandates large electric transmission facilities to pay into a "bank" for mitigation and conservation of endangered species and other natural adverse impacts that might stem from line construction. This is after typical standards and conditions are applied to address environmental mitigation – this fee would be applied if extra mitigation would need to take place through the payment of the fee. While this was implemented in New York public laws, this model can be applied for a developer working with a community – establishing a "fund" for mitigation activities. Prior to this, the potential impacts of a transmission facility and mitigation measures were investigated by the Office of Renewable Energy Siting and Electric Transmission in consultation with the New York department of Environmental Conservation.

[99] https://newyork.public.law/laws/n.y._public_service_law_section_139

Champlain Hudson Power Express (CHPE)

It is also notable that another New York-based example, the CHPE line, has invested more than $117 million over the course of 35 years to fund environmental protection benefits through the Hudson and Lake Champlain Habit Enhancement/Improvement Trust Fund (overseen by state and local agencies, as well as advocacy groups)[100], and funding outreach to disadvantaged communities to provide funding for specific community initiatives through the "Disadvantaged Community Benefits Framework" CHPE established[101]. CHPE also frames the access it provides to renewables through its line as part of its environmental initiatives.

New England Clean Power Link[102]

The New England Clean Power Link invested hundreds of millions of dollars focused on clean energy and wetland habitat restoration funds.

Canada

Manitoba-Minnesota Transmission Project (MMTP)

The Manitoba-Minnesota Transmission Project is a 213 km, high-voltage (500 kV) transmission line developed by Manitoba Hydro, connecting the Dorsey Converter Station near Rosser, Manitoba, to the U.S. border near Piney, Manitoba.[103]

In addition to strengthening Manitoba's electrical grid and supporting the integration of renewable hydroelectric power, the project provides multiple environmental benefits through its mitigation measures, environmental protection strategies, and contributions to environmental justice. These benefits align with regulatory commitments and best practices for sustainable infrastructure development. [104,105]

The project integrates environmental mitigation by offsetting the impact on wetlands and Crown lands. Through the Wetland Offset Measures Plan and No Net Loss of Wetlands Plan, Manitoba Hydro compensated for the 0.326 hectares of wetlands lost due to the construction of transmission towers and substations. This compensation was executed through a 3:1 offset ratio, ensuring that for every hectare of wetlands

[100] https://chpexpress.com/environmental-benefits/
[101] https://documents.dps.ny.gov/public/common/ViewDoc.aspx?DocRefId={903ED3B5-BC2F-430C-8F4E-9E3A4B1C7B3F}
[102] https://www.utilitydive.com/news/transmission-buildout-stakeholders-community-niskanen/720132/

[103] https://www.hydro.mb.ca/corporate/regulatory-affairs/projects/#mmtp
[104]https://www.hydro.mb.ca/docs/projects/mmtp/contractors_environmental_management_plan_section1.pdf
[105]https://www.hydro.mb.ca/docs/projects/mmtp/contractors_environmental_management_plan_section2.pdf

lost, three hectares were restored or enhanced elsewhere. A total of $14,494 was allocated to the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation (MHHC) to finance these restoration efforts. [106,107]

In addition to direct compensation, the project incorporates environmental protection strategies to minimize ecological disturbances during construction and operation. These include strategic routing to avoid high-value ecological areas, construction in frozen conditions to reduce soil compaction, and limited herbicide use to maintain wetland biodiversity. The Environmental Management Plan (EMP) developed for MMTP required strict compliance with erosion and sediment control, groundwater management, and soil preservation to prevent long-term environmental degradation. A two-year post-construction monitoring program was implemented to assess the success of these measures, ensuring that wetlands remained functional and continued to support local ecosystems. [108]

The project also integrates environmental justice principles, particularly in relation to Indigenous land use and compensation. The Crown Land Offset Measures Plan was developed to compensate for the permanent loss of Crown lands traditionally used by Indigenous communities for hunting, fishing, and cultural practices. Manitoba Hydro created a trust fund of $815,219 to acquire and designate 96.4 hectares of private land as protected Crown land, ensuring that Indigenous groups retained access to natural resources. The selection of offset lands was guided by consultations with 21 Indigenous communities, incorporating traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) into the decision-making process. However, some Indigenous groups raised concerns about the adequacy of the offset measures and called for a more inclusive approach to land governance and environmental monitoring.[109]

In 2021, the Canada Energy Regulator (CER) formally approved the Wetland Offset Measures Plan, confirming compliance with federal and provincial environmental laws. Additionally, in 2022, the Wetland Project Agreement was signed between Manitoba Hydro, the Province of Manitoba, and MHHC, ensuring long-term conservation commitments. Despite initial opposition and concerns, the project demonstrates how large-scale energy infrastructure can integrate environmental

[106]https://www.hydro.mb.ca/docs/projects/mmtp/wetland_offset_measures_plan_and_no_net_loss_of_wetlands_plan.pdf
[107] https://mbhabitat.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/MMTP-Wetland-Offset-Final-Report-2023.pdf?utm
[108] https://www.hydro.mb.ca/docs/projects/mmtp/eis/mmtp_eis_summary.pdf
[109] https://www.hydro.mb.ca/docs/projects/mmtp/crown_land_offset_measures_plan.pdf

sustainability and Indigenous collaboration to mitigate ecological impacts while supporting renewable energy development.[110]

The Manitoba-Minnesota Transmission Project serves as a case study in responsible environmental management, balancing economic and energy needs with wetland conservation, land protection, and Indigenous engagement. The structured approach to compensation, environmental restoration, and long-term monitoring ensures that the project contributes positively to biodiversity protection and environmental sustainability.

[110] https://mbhabitat.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/MMTP-Wetland-Offset-Final-Report-2023.pdf

Further Reading and Resources on Negotiating Community Benefits

Existing Guidance and Best Practices

- Columbia University: Expert Insights on Best Practices for Community Benefits Agreements
- Americans for a Clean Energy Grid (ACEG) and DNV: The Pace of Trust: A Framework by Community Voices for Advancing Transmission
- U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration: Development Agreements and Other Contract-Based Value Capture Techniques-A Primer
- Good Jobs First: Community Benefits Agreements: Making Development Projects Accountable
- Bennett Jones: Indigenous Ownership in Energy Infrastructure
- National Renewable Energy Laboratory: Setting the Baseline: The Current
- Understanding of Equity in Land-Based Wind Energy Development and Operation
- First Nations Major Project Coalition: The Role of Indigenous People in Major Project Development - Part II

Example Community Benefit Agreements (CBAs) and Related Materials

- Columbia University: Community Benefits Agreements Database
- World Resources Institute: Database of Community Benefit Frameworks Across the US
- Rocky Mountain Institute: Community Benefits Catalog
- National Renewable Energy Laboratory: Grid Resilience and Innovative Partnerships Program
- HydroQuebec: Agreement on the Siting of Power Lines on Farms and in Woodlands
- Manitoba Clean Environment Commission: Bipole III Transmission Project: Report on Public Hearing
- Maine PUC: Stipulation for New England Clean Energy Connect (NECEC)
- Central California Joint Cable/Fisheries Liaison Committee: Agreement Between Cable Companies and Fishermen

- City of Richmond: Chevron Refinery Modernization Project Environmental and Community Investment Agreement
- Xcel Energy: Pollinator Pledge
- Vineyard Power Cooperative: Community Benefits Agreement Summary
- Consumers Energy: Transmission Project Application
- New York Public Service Law Section 139: General provisions related to establishing standards related to siting major electric transmission facilities
- Champlain Hudson Power Express: Tier 4 Disadvantaged Community Benefits Framework
- Muskeko Joint Venture: Environmental Management Plan
- Manitoba-Minnesota Transmission Project: Wetland Offset Measures Plan And No Net Loss of Wetlands Plan
- Manitoba-Minnesota Transmission Project: Crown Land Offset Measures Plan