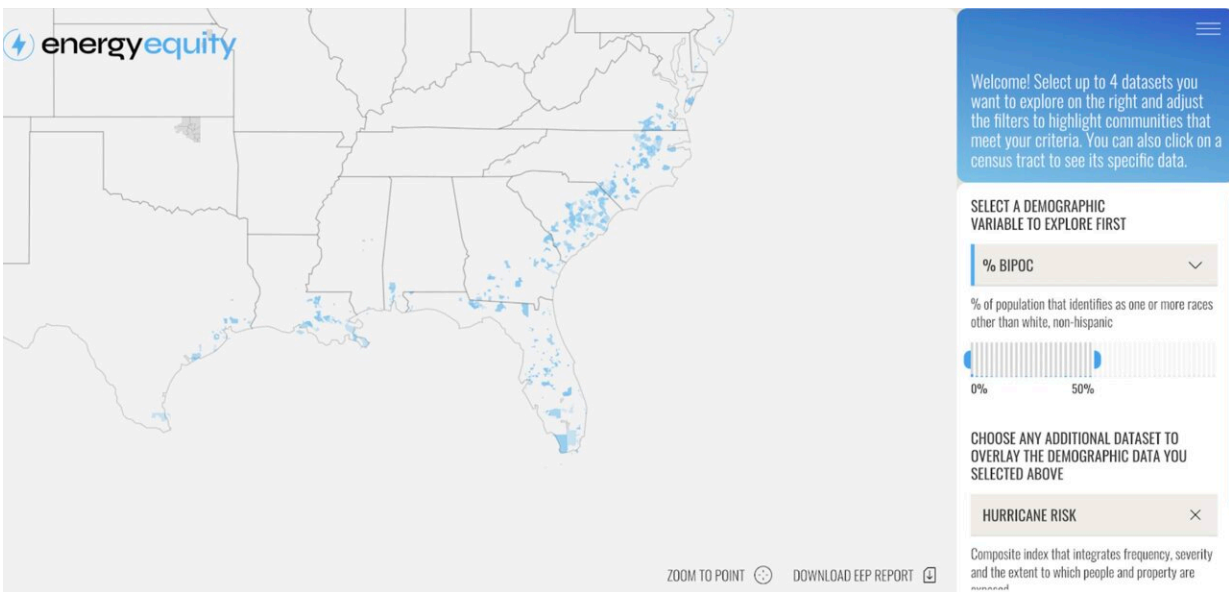


First national framework designed to measure and advance energy equity

September 1 2022, by Denise Spranger



An application of the Energy Equity Interactive Map that shows census tracts that are majority BIPOC and have high risk of hurricane impacts. Credit: University of Michigan

To bolster a just transition to cleaner, more resilient energy systems, the University of Michigan's [Energy Equity Project](#) has released the first standardized national framework for comprehensively measuring and advancing energy equity.

Energy [equity](#) recognizes the historical and cumulative burdens of the

energy system borne by frontline and low-income communities. To eliminate these disparities, energy equity centers the voices of frontline communities in energy planning and decision making and ensures the fair distribution of clean energy benefits and ownership.

"For decades, Black, Indigenous, and people of color, frontline and low-income communities have borne the brunt of the negative impacts of the energy system while receiving a negligible slice of benefits from the clean energy transition," said EEP project manager Justin Schott. "With the EEP Framework, we are both illuminating these inequities and establishing a process for reversing them. We can hope for the day when energy equity is the norm, but until then, the framework is a powerful tool for accountability and ensuring measurable progress."

The Energy Equity Project is housed at U-M's School for Environment and Sustainability and is funded by the Energy Foundation, the Joyce Foundation, and Crown Family Philanthropies.

Schott noted that EEP builds on the longtime contributions of energy justice leaders and frontline environmental justice communities by synthesizing existing resources and compiling dozens of data sets and best practices.

"The framework is effectively an atlas of energy equity, and we hope users of all types, from a public utilities commissioner to a community activist will find valuable insights and guidance," said Schott. "We can't wait to partner with organizations that are ready to apply this inaugural framework in their own communities."

The EEP Framework was launched by SEAS Associate Professor Tony Reames, now serving as deputy director for energy justice at the U.S. Department of Energy while he is on leave from U-M.

The Energy Equity Project's development is the result of 15 months of collaboration including 10 listening sessions with more than 400 participants representing utilities, regulators, non-profit and academic practitioners, grassroots community organizations and philanthropists. Over 10 months, 45 work group members—leaders in energy equity from around the country—developed guiding principles, evaluated potential metrics and datasets, and determined how to represent equity through a combination of metrics, data and best practices.

Lamisa Chowdhury, managing director of the national organization Network for Energy, Water, and Health in Affordable Buildings, served as the lead author of the EEP Procedural Equity Workgroup.

"We intentionally took a human-centered approach, acknowledging the inequitable impacts that past and current processes have on communities, and collaboratively imagined pathways toward deep systems change and energy democracy," Chowdhury said.

"The data, and lack thereof, tells an unsettling story: We simply do not have a history of inclusive, equity-centered processes in the energy space," Chowdhury said. "Communities of color have continued to be harmed by and excluded from energy decision-making processes, and categorically denied the benefits of energy programs and investments."

The release of the EEP Framework comes at a critical time, as energy justice is now a requirement for acceptance of federal funds, most notably the infrastructure bill.

That mandate is rooted in the Biden administration's Justice40 Initiative, which pledges to deliver 40% of climate investment benefits including clean energy and energy efficiency, affordable and sustainable housing, remediation of legacy pollution and the development of critical clean water and wastewater infrastructure, to disadvantaged communities.

But until now, efforts to define and identify both benefits and disadvantaged communities have primarily relied on demographic data—a definition which leaves significant gaps in recognizing distributional justice such as energy affordability, clean energy jobs and climate resilience—as well as efforts to quantify procedural and restorative justice.

The EEP Framework was designed specifically to remedy those gaps, ensuring Black, Indigenous, and people of color, frontline, and [low-income communities](#) receive the benefits that they deserve. To better reach that goal, the framework also provides a guide for community organizations, practitioners, regulators and utilities to measurably increase equity in their local contexts.

"With trillions of dollars in state and federal funding supporting climate efforts, the framework is primed for immediate adoption by government agencies, community organizations, regulators and utilities," framework authors wrote.

Later this year, EEP will release an interactive national map. Designed to be accessible for the general public, the map will offer a unique opportunity to explore the intersectionality of energy equity data. Users of the map will be able to identify census tracts of concern such as those who are at high risk from heat waves and have a large population of seniors who live alone.

Kyle Whyte, the George Willis Pack Professor at SEAS, currently serves on the White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council and is the principal investigator of EEP.

"The project's commitment to genuine democratic collaboration has fostered transformational results that will change the lives of communities who have suffered from high energy costs, pollution, and

few opportunities for renewable energy," Whyte said. "EEP uplifts voices and diverse knowledge about how energy in America works. The project has become a dynamic collective of people and organizations from all over the map poised for future work."

The next steps for EEP begin with two webinars which are open to the public. Later this fall, EEP will issue a call for partners who see opportunities to use the EEP Framework to further their local energy equity priorities. These could range from developing local [energy](#) equity indicators to making public engagement processes more accessible and transparent.

EEP will prioritize applications from Black, Indigenous and people of color and frontline community organizations. For all other potential users of the framework, EEP will offer a free series of training on how to apply the [framework](#).

More information: EEP Framework: energyequityproject.com/

Provided by University of Michigan

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