



**NATIONAL
WILDLIFE
FEDERATION**

National Wildlife Federation's Workbook:

Cultivating Rural Communities' Approaches to Nature and Electrification (CRANE)



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With special thanks to Green & Gray Collaborations

Defining Resilience

Communities are defined as “resilient” when towns or cities have plans for both immediate and long-term needs. Resilient communities can also recover from natural disasters faster while adapting to future challenges. Challenges from natural disasters and severe weather include limited budgets, energy insecurity, failed infrastructure, limited government budgets, and economic uncertainty. Resilient communities have the opportunity to build the energy infrastructure needed to ensure everyone has access to renewable and low-cost energy, reducing the impact of these challenges.

The National Wildlife Federation knows people are the key to proactively planning for resilient communities. Social connections built during stable times boost communities’ abilities to respond when challenges arise.

Resilient Rural Communities in a Changing World

Rural communities are unique places full of rich histories. They are often distinguished by compact downtowns and villages, rolling farmlands, working forests, and a long-standing commitment to citizen engagement. Thoughtful planning creates the characteristics that make rural communities great places to live.

Rural communities know that keeping a place great requires working in a rapidly changing world. We can survive these challenges — and thrive with planning and action. That’s where these worksheets in this workbook can help.

The Importance of Building a Community Vision

The worksheets are centered around building your community’s visions for land use, energy development, and other goals. A “community vision” is what community members want their town to look like in the future. Creating a shared vision, including in town plans and building local projects, invites cooperation and collaboration to guide planning, policies, and programs. Completing the worksheets in this workbook is a great way to start or build on your community’s vision.

What are the Worksheets?

These worksheets are checklists of questions to help rural communities determine how resilient they are. The National Wildlife Federation has broken down resilience in several key areas to make the process as easy as possible, including land use, natural resources conservation, energy development, and healthy community planning. Knowing where your community stands is the first step toward developing local goals, next steps, and fundraising plans that build or reinforce resilience.

Why Use the Worksheets?

The need for community resilience is more important than ever because the issues we face will affect future generations. By proactively tackling those challenges, especially energy development challenges, we can do more than just cope with change; we can build stronger communities where energy projects serve everyone.



Who Should Use the Worksheets?

These worksheets are intended for towns and communities concerned about their ability to access electricity.

How to Use the Worksheets?

Each worksheet in this workbook is used to help you focus on a specific area of resilience in your rural community. They can be used together, or individually. Each worksheet asks a series of questions, with a score for each response.

Each worksheet has the following scoring system, ranking how resilient your community is on that challenge:

- “Resilient Community”: Community already has plans in place for future resiliency.
- “Transitioning Community”: Community has begun implementing resiliency plans, with room for improvement.
- “Community Needs Attention”: Little or no resiliency measures in place, high community opportunities for resiliency.

The National Wildlife Federation suggests using the following steps to best use these worksheets and create a community vision for resiliency:

Step 1: Read through the worksheets in this workbook.

Step 2: Determine which worksheets to complete based on the challenges your community is facing or would like to address.

Step 3: Complete the desired worksheets.

Step 4: Feel free to reach out to National Wildlife Federation staff with any questions.

Step 5: Review the “Suggested Tips for Building Resilience” below your worksheet score.

Step 6: See the “Next Steps” section of the document for tips on how to use these results.



Worksheet 1: Community Engagement and Public Participation

Community engagement and public participation are the cornerstones to creating transformational processes and strong and resilient neighborhoods. A shared community vision can affect the goals and projects the community seeks to create. Where we live and what happens in our neighborhoods matters.

We choose what infrastructure is built, how we use our land, and how we interact with the environment. Meaningful collaboration between town residents, property owners, renters, business owners, energy committees, conservation commissions, historic preservation groups, and others is integral for successful planning. Community visions and resiliency plans should serve all currently impacted and potentially affected community members in the future.

The purpose of this worksheet is to assess how your local community is doing when it comes to promoting public participation, to understand what pre-work may be needed before successfully engaging on transmission or renewable energy issues, or where challenges may arise. Ensuring all voices can be heard when making decisions related to how land will be used or preserved, as well as renewable energy and transmission planning, promotes resilience. It also encourages the best chance of achieving a community vision.

Tips for Accurate Scoring

- Review local rules and regulations on public participation and meeting notices.
- Review local and state data, including information from the Bureau of Land Management and your state's natural resources agency.

Question 1. Does the town keep an accurate record of the diverse populations in the community? This can be based on state data, federal data, and local knowledge.

- A. Yes. + 3
- B. Somewhat, the town keeps data but does not regularly update the data + 2
- C. No. + 1

Question 2. Does your town have a website, social media, a printed newsletter, or mailing list to notify residents about projects, events, transit options, public meetings, and community events?

- A. Yes, we have a website, newsletter, or other outreach tool that is widely distributed and regularly updated for outreach. + 3
- B. Yes, but outreach is not consistent, or we do not keep the contact information updated. +2
- C. No, we do not have a website or other methods of outreach. +1

Question 3. Are these notification avenues available in languages other than English based on the needs of local residents?

- A. Yes. +2
- B. No. +1

Question 4. Does the town account for health conditions, disabilities, and translation service needs of community members, when scheduling public meetings?

- A. Yes, the town offers virtual and in-person methods of participation, offers translation services when needed for community members, and guarantees that the locations of the meetings are accessible by all community members. +3
- B. The town has these resources available but does not advertise them ahead of meetings. +2
- C. No. +1

Worksheet 1: Community Engagement and Public Participation (Continued)

Question 5. Does the town share technical/training/orientation materials in advance of the event to ensure the resources are easily understood and language accessible for all?

- A. Yes. +3
- B. No. +0

Question 6. Does the town publish, document, and keep consistent records of all meetings in formats that are accessible to all community members (digital and paper formats and in accessible languages)?

- A. Yes. +3
- B. No. +0

Question 7. Does the town credit the people/organizations whose ideas or feedback is incorporated into the final policies, town plan program (ex. verbal/written acknowledgments attributed comments etc.)?

- A. Yes. +3
- B. No. +0

Question 8. How active is your community in planning, including updating the town plan?

- A. There are rarely vacancies on boards, and multiple applications create competition for vacancies. There is good attendance at public meetings and support for town initiatives. +3
- B. There are some vacancies on boards, but it often takes extra effort to fill openings. Attendance is good at high-visibility meetings, but not for ongoing or general planning sessions. +2
- C. Board positions are vacant for months. Meetings are sparsely attended. +1

Question 9. How successful is the town at implementing the town plan's recommendations?

- A. Very successful; the town plan guides the majority of projects and investments, and the town's regulations align with and implement town plan policies. +3
- B. Moderately successful; the town plan is used for some projects, and the regulations are somewhat consistent with the town plan policies. +2
- C. Not successful; the town engages in planning, but the plan is not reviewed frequently or updated to align with the priorities of the community. +1

Question 10. Are locals active in planning, development, energy, and resource protection through community organizations?

- A. Yes. At least two of these groups are active in town: a community development organization, a downtown organization, a historical society, a land trust, a conservation commission, and/or an energy committee. +3
- B. At least one of the above groups or a similar group is active in the town. +2
- C. None of these groups is active in town. +1

Question 11. Do residents involved in town leadership and committees reflect the gender, age, income, ethnic, racial and/or other diversity of your community, and does the town's leadership create a respectful environment where all people feel comfortable participating?

- A. Yes. Our leadership reflects much of the diversity of our community and our town culture is inclusive. +3
- B. Somewhat. There is some diversity in town leadership and diverse viewpoints are recognized. +2
- C. There is room for improvement. Membership in local groups does not
- D. reflect the diversity in our community, and we do not often hear diverse viewpoints. + 1

Worksheet 1: Community Engagement and Public Participation (Continued)

Scoring

- **23-33 Resilient Community**
- **12-22 Transitioning Community**
- **1-11 Community Needs Attention**

Depending on your community's score, you and your partners may have some important work to do to improve readiness—or resilience—for effective engagement on renewable energy and transmission projects.

Suggested Steps for Building Resilience with your Town and Local Decision-Makers:

- Encourage public engagement and build resilience with events and celebrations.
- Effectively engage people in decision-making through creative and accessible public engagement.
- Support municipal board members by budgeting for and providing educational opportunities to make their jobs easier.
- Identify key partners such as big energy users and neighbors to form a local team.
- Create a newsletter, email list, webpage, etc. to engage and inform residents.
- Establish a community group (energy committee, conservation commission, historic preservation group, land trust, etc.) to identify and work on town needs and projects.
- Establish a competency committee to examine opportunities for improving accessibility, diversity, and inclusiveness.

Worksheet 2: Energy Planning Structure

Local energy planning can help communities tackle the global problems of severe weather and ever-rising energy costs. An important first step is collecting data on local energy use and future needs. This will help your town set clear goals and monitor progress. Having a dedicated energy committee or coordinator, documenting your town's energy use, or using energy financing tools are examples of other steps that any community can use to get started.

Tips for Accurate Scoring

- Review your town plan, zoning, and subdivision regulations
- Consult your local conservation commission
- Meet with state, local, and regional environmental groups, as well as state energy, and environment/conservation, and fish and wildlife agencies
- Review aerial photos on water and sewer systems that your town, state agencies, or local planning commission may have on file.

Question 1. Does your town have an Energy Committee or appointed Energy Coordinator?

- A. Yes, we have an active energy committee and/or energy coordinator that leads energy planning and implementation, or another committee, such as the conservation commission, has taken on these responsibilities. +3 points
- B. We have an energy committee or coordinator, but they are inactive or meet infrequently. +2
- C. No. +1

Question 2. How has your town included energy use data in the town plan?

- A. We have comprehensive energy use data compiled for electrical, heating, and transportation needs, and we have incorporated this data into our town plan. +3
- B. We have some energy use data compiled for certain uses, but not all, and do not incorporate it into the town plan. +2
- C. We do not have any energy use data compiled. +1

Question 3. Has your town conducted a carbon inventory for electrical, heating, and transportation uses, and included it in the town plan?

- A. Yes. +3
- B. We have conducted a carbon inventory for some energy use categories. +2
- C. No. +1

Question 4. Does your town plan for renewable energy investments or energy reduction measures in the capital budget or annual budget?

- A. Yes, we have a reserve fund to pay for all or some of the anticipated energy efficiency and renewable energy projects — and allocate money annually for smaller improvements. +3
- B. We have not spent municipal funds on energy projects and improvements, but we plan to do so in the next year or have spent grant money on projects and improvements. +2
- C. No. +1

Scoring

- **9-12 Resilient Community**
- **5-8 Transitioning Community**
- **1-4 Community Needs Attention**

Depending on your community's score, you and your partners may have some important work to do to improve readiness—or resilience—for effective engagement on renewable energy and transmission projects.

Suggested Steps for Building Resilience with your Town and Local Decision Makers:

- Collect, update, and analyze energy use data by publishing surveys to determine energy use for residential, commercial, and municipal sectors in your town. Use that information to inform planning.
- Devote funding for energy investments in the capital or annual town budget.
- Start an energy committee or appoint an energy coordinator (or team) and begin examining energy issues.

Worksheet 3: Protecting Natural Resources and the Environment

Your community's natural and historic areas are invaluable for the ecological, recreational, and cultural opportunities that they provide. They help to form the backbone of the state's economy. Natural areas also offer other environmental benefits including flood risk mitigation, erosion control, carbon absorption, wildlife habitat, and water purification – benefits that together are often called “ecosystem services.”

Ecosystem services are benefits that people obtain from the natural environment including carbon absorption by forests and water purification from wetlands. Benefits can also include cultural, spiritual, and intellectual enrichment are also considered services that ecosystems provide.

Biodiverse ecosystems create healthier people and communities. Identifying the natural areas of your town, and understanding their conditions, can inform the development of renewable energy and transmission planning strategies that preserve or improve the environment—improving the community's quality of life and overall community resilience.

Tips for Accurate Scoring

- Review town plan, zoning, and subdivision regulations
- Consult local conservation commission, state/local/regional environmental or conservation groups, or state agencies to apply the best available science

Question 1. Which of these best describes the condition and health of water bodies in your town?

- A. Water bodies are renewable and clear, without sediment covering the bottom. There are vegetated buffers along rivers and in the floodplain. There are conserved lands that do not have any development where streams can overflow during storms. +3
- B. Water is generally renewable and readily accessible, but we have some problem areas. Many rivers lack vegetated buffers to help protect against flooding. +2
- C. Waters are impaired, dirty or toxic, and unsuitable for swimming, fishing, and other recreation. Few vegetated buffers are protecting the stream banks in the case of flooding, and it is not safe to swim, or fish. +1

Optional: Question 2. Which of these best describes the condition of your town's forest land, if your town has any designated forest land?

- A. Large blocks of forest (50-100+ acres) are intact and not fragmented by long driveways or areas cleared for development. +3
- B. Many large blocks of forest have been lost and fragmented, but some forested areas remain for recreation, forestry, and wildlife. +2
- C. Few large blocks of forest remain available. Those that are left have limited usefulness for recreation, forestry, and wildlife. +1

Question 3. Does your town plan include specific language about groundwater, including large withdrawals (more than 57,600 gallons per day)?

- A. Yes. Our town plan discusses the importance of groundwater and makes recommendations about large withdrawals and/or commercial extraction of water. + 3
- B. The town plan mentions the importance of protecting groundwater, but we do not have specific policies about large withdrawals, or our policies are not updated frequently. +2
- C. Our town plan does not address groundwater issues. +1

Worksheet 3: Protecting Natural Resources and the Environment (Continued)

Question 4. Has your town adopted regulations requiring new construction to incorporate, maintain, or enhance riparian buffers for projects that are near lakes, rivers, and streams?

- A. Yes, we require a vegetated buffer of a certain width informed by the best available science, as well as consideration of fluvial erosion hazard areas/riparian corridors in site design. +3
- B. No, but we actively encourage and educate property owners about incorporating, maintaining, or enhancing riparian buffers. +2
- C. No, our town has taken little or no action related to establishing riparian buffer protection or enhancement at the local level. +1

Question 5. How does your town manage stormwater runoff from snowmelt and major rain events?

- A. The town has permitting standards for stormwater that are more stringent than state permitting requirements, or equal to state requirements if the state requirements are informed by the best available science. +3
- B. The town offers information about how property owners can maximize infiltration of stormwater (e.g., permeable pavement, rain gardens, rain barrels, vegetated buffers). +2
- C. The town has no regulations beyond state permitting requirements. +1

Question 6. What, if any, regulatory actions is your town taking to protect natural resources?

- A. We have strong provisions to protect natural resources — such as wetlands, riparian areas, habitat, significant natural communities, and sites for rare plant and animal species — in the development review process, zoning, and/or subdivision regulations. +3
- B. We have made provisions to protect some, but not all, natural areas in development review, zoning, and/or subdivision regulations. +2
- C. We have made no provisions to protect natural resources in our regulations. +1

Question 7. What actions is your town taking to protect habitat connectivity and conserve wildlife habitat?

- A. We have strong regulations to prevent loss of habitat connectivity, promote thriving habitats, and have a heightened standard of review for development in significant wild areas. +3
- B. We have discussed habitat connectivity and wildlife habitat in our town plan, but it is not incorporated into our bylaws. +2
- C. We have not discussed preventing the loss of habitat connectivity and conserving wildlife habitat. +1

Question 8. What non-regulatory actions is your town taking to protect natural areas and prevent fragmentation?

- A. We assist with building and infrastructure siting, and we inventory and map natural resources, encourage landowner participation in relevant state programs, promote land conservation, provide local funding, and/or discuss important natural resources in the town plan. +3
- B. We do some of these, but not consistently. +2
- C. We do not undertake non-regulatory approaches to manage our natural resources. +1

Scoring

- 21-27 Resilient Community
- 11-20 Transitioning Community
- 1-10 Community Needs Attention

Depending on your community's score, you and your partners may have some important work to do to improve readiness—or resilience—for effective engagement on renewable energy and transmission projects.

Suggested Steps for Building Resilience with your Town and Local Decision-Makers:

- Address connectivity, biodiversity, and fragmentation in zoning and subdivision bylaws.
- Update town bylaws as informed by the best available science.
- Review what natural resource protections exist in zoning and subdivision bylaws, and update them as necessary to meet town goals.
- Work with your town and state and local federal agencies to inventory natural resources and discuss the inventory in the town plan.

Worksheet 4: Preserving Historic Features and Public Access to Open Spaces

Preservation of public open spaces and historical features can help a community create a strong sense of place while promoting active and healthy lifestyles. Open spaces include land not occupied by structures, buildings, roads, rights-of-way, and parking lots, and is designated, either through an easement or permit restriction, to remain undeveloped. Farms, fields, parks, and blocks of forests are great candidates for designated “open spaces”.

Open spaces can be venues for community-based activities and town-organized events—like farmer’s markets—that add to residents’ overall well-being while increasing tourism. Examining the availability of open spaces and the preservation of historical features can help a town prioritize, protect, and more effectively use these spaces. Preserving historic features and public access to open spaces ensures rural communities can connect, play, and enjoy the outdoors. In the context of energy development, it is important to balance the need for open space with the development of needed new energy structures.

Tips for Accurate Scoring

- Review town plan, zoning, subdivision regulations
- Review parcel maps
- Talk to town residents about what access they have to open space

Question 1. Do town residents have local access to open space for hiking, hunting, fishing, etc.?

- A. Yes. Most large parcels of open space are either publicly owned or privately owned but open to public use. + 3
- B. Most large open parcels are privately owned; some are open to public use. + 2
- C. No. Most of, or all, open parcels are privately owned and closed to the public. + 1

Question 2. Has the town planned for future access to parks and/or open space?

- A. Yes, the town plan maps existing parks and open space, and has plans for expanding them, acquiring more, and/or connecting them. + 3
- B. The plan outlines the importance of parks and open spaces but is not specific about how to acquire, improve, or retain them. +2
- C. No, the community has not addressed this. +1

Question 3. For new development, how do local regulations provide for open space and continued access to existing trailheads and public spaces?

- A. New development must conform to the town’s open space plan, creating additional open space and connections to adjacent open spaces (either existing or planned, such as a planned park or recreation trail). + 3
- B. Larger development must provide accessible, open spaces, but regulations do not specify the types of these open spaces. + 2
- C. There are no provisions for open space with new developments. +1

Question 4. For new developments, do local regulations account for the location of open spaces to communities who have not had access to these spaces in the past, especially due to cost or distance from their homes?

- A. New development must conform to the town’s open space plan, creating additional open space and connections to adjacent open spaces (either existing or planned, such as a planned park or recreation trail). +3
- B. Some of the local regulations consider the location of open spaces to subcommunities without access to open spaces. +2
- C. No. +1

Worksheet 4: Preserving Historic Features and Public Access to Open Spaces (Continued)

Question 5. Does your town collect data on the ability of subcommunities to have access to open spaces?

- A. Yes, the town regularly collects data to ensure all community members can access the open spaces. +3
- B. The town has some data but does not collect new data consistently. +2
- C. No. +1

Question 6. Which of these options best describes the conditions of historic buildings in your community?

- A. Most are well-maintained and in use. +3
- B. Most are in poor condition, but they are in use. + 2
- C. Most historic buildings are vacant or have been demolished. +1

Question 7. What actions is your town taking to protect historic buildings and other features?

- A. We have defined a historic district, along with guidelines for development within it. We have (or are in the process of applying for) a state-designated downtown or village center that allows us to access historic building tax credits. + 3
- B. We have highlighted the importance of historic buildings and other features, but we have no specific strategies to maintain or enhance them. +2
- C. We have made little or no mention of historic buildings and features. + 1

Question 8. Does your town consider the historic features of all communities? Historic features include cultural spaces, monuments, cemeteries, preserved buildings, and more.

- A. Historic features are defined by the histories of all community members and considered in the town plan. +3
- B. Some historic features are defined but do not include the histories of all community members. +2
- C. Nothing. +1

Scoring

- **21-27 Resilient Community**
- **11-20 Transitioning Community**
- **1-10 Community Needs Attention**

Depending on your community's score, you and your partners may have some important work to do to improve readiness—or resilience—for effective engagement on renewable energy and transmission projects.

Suggested Steps for Building Resilience with your Town and Local Decision-Makers:

- Develop an open space plan incorporating local and regional resources.
- Pursue land conservation for parks, recreation, and conservation purposes, using local funds or land trust models.
- Develop regulations for historic areas of town.
- Reach out to landowners to request access to private land to promote access to open spaces.
- Add open space requirements to zoning and subdivision bylaws.
- Define a historic district or a state-designated village/downtown.
- Plan for parks/open spaces on the official town map.
- Establish a town forest.
- Form a conservation commission and a historic preservation group and or work with a local land trust.

Worksheet 5: Strengthen and Protect Agricultural Land and Forests While Minimizing Development Conflicts

Agricultural land and forests are critical components of different states' economies and create a working landscape that is central to rural identities. Protecting and promoting the conservation of these resources not only helps the local economy but also supports dense and walkable town centers.

Identifying existing agricultural lands and forestlands aids in developing working land zoning districts. These lands have low density and usually heightened standards of review for any changes in current use or development. In turn, this aids in dedicating funding for the purchase of conservation easements and/or prime agricultural land. All of these steps can be taken to support and balance the need for these important local agricultural, forest, and working lands with new energy structures.

Tips for Accurate Scoring

- Review town plan, zoning, subdivision regulations
- Review parcel maps
- Contact local, regional, or statewide land trust
- Consult town clerk on tax questions
- Have ongoing dialogues with local farmers and foresters

Question 1. Does your town plan have strategies for keeping farm and forestland in productive use (i.e., agriculture and/or forestry districts, town conservation fund, map of prime agricultural soils)?

- A. Yes, we have a set of strategies and policies that address land use and economic development as they relate to agriculture and forestry. +3
- B. We have some specific strategies. +2
- C. We have no strategies, or vague strategies +1

Question 2. How do your town's regulations ensure that farm and forest land is kept in productive use?

- A. We have zoning districts promoting agriculture and forestry uses. The districts have low densities, meaning new home construction is either not permitted or any development is a "conditional use" to meet strict standards. Our community even has incentives or different standards of review for subdivisions and other development that isn't farm or forest land. + 3
- B. We have special districts that promote agriculture and/or forestry by regulating density and making housing a conditional use, but no special subdivision or development review standards for home or commercial construction. + 2
- C. We do not have special agriculture or forest districts, or do not have zoning. + 1

Question 3. What densities of development does your zoning allow on farm and forestland?

- A. Low average densities (1 unit of housing or a commercial buildings per 25 acres or less), with provisions or requirements for small lots (as in clustering or conservation zoning), to protect farmland or forestland. +3
- B. Low densities of housing or commercial buildings, but without provisions for small lots; or high densities. +2
- C. High densities of housing or commercial buildings, with no provisions to protect farmland or forestland. +1

Question 4. Is there local support for farming and/or forestry through tax abatements?

- A. Yes, we offer tax abatements and/or a dedicated fund. + 3
- B. We have, or are working on, a plan to offer tax abatements. + 2
- C. No, we do not pursue these approaches + 1

Worksheet 5: Strengthen and Protect Agricultural Land and Forests While Minimizing Development Conflicts (Continued)

Question 5. Is your town supporting conservation and/or land trust activity through a dedicated town fund to help purchase or protect prime working land?

- A. Yes, we have a line item for conservation in the town budget. +3
- B. We do not have a regular town funding source, but encourage land trust activity and have town plan language about the value of conservation. +2
- C. No, we discourage conservation/land trust activity or are silent on the issue. +1

Scoring

- 11-15 Resilient Community
- 6-10 Transitioning Community
- 1-5 Community Needs Attention

Depending on your community's score, you and your partners may have some important work to do to improve readiness—or resilience—for effective engagement on renewable energy and transmission projects.

Suggested Steps for Building Resilience with your Town and Local Decision Makers:

- Zone for forest practices by allowing access to parcels, landing/turnaround areas, etc.
- Support working lands with a town fund, tax abatements, or conservation easements.
- Implement density and clustering provisions so that surrounding land can still be worked after development.
- Develop conservation and forest zoning districts.
- Map the land to understand and plan for existing farm and forest resources.

Worksheet 6: Promote Renewable Energy and Transmission Development Balanced with the Community's Goals for Land Use

Renewable energy resources, like solar and wind, and modern transmission lines can promote reliability and resilience in the face of severe weather. Helping your community identify areas for projects of various scales and strategies for homeowners to meet their own electrification needs is essential. A town's plan and bylaws are important places to articulate a town's vision for renewable energy and transmission development.

Tips for Accurate Scoring

- Review town plan, zoning, and subdivision regulations
- Contact local, regional, or statewide land trust
- Create ongoing dialogues with state agencies about state and federal funding programs
- Create ongoing dialogues with local utilities, developers

Question 1. Has your town identified areas where it would like to see more renewable energy and transmission development?

- A. Yes, we have mapped areas and these maps are included in the town plan. +3
- B. We have identified these areas, but have not comprehensively mapped them or made the information readily accessible. +2
- C. We have not identified or mapped these areas. +1

Question 2. Do your town plan's policies support renewable energy and transmission projects? For example: solar projects, wind projects, or new or upgraded transmission lines.

- A. Our town plan policies support renewable energy development and transmission to meet our electricity needs. +3
- B. We have explored some options for supporting renewable energy and transmission, including possible sites and financing options, but have not implemented them. We are updating our town plan policies to support this. +2
- C. We have not considered renewable energy development or transmission nor do we address these in our town plan, or we have ordinances creating barriers to renewable energy development. +1

Question 3. Has your town developed ongoing relationships with local utilities and merchant developers who likely have interests in developing renewable energy and transmission projects in your town?

- A. We have working relationships with local utilities and merchant developers who likely have interests in developing renewable energy and transmission projects in our town. +3
- B. We have some working relationships with local utilities and merchant developers who likely have interests in developing renewable energy and transmission projects in our town. +2
- C. We have no working relationships with local utilities and merchant developers who likely have interests in developing renewable energy and transmission projects in our town. +1

Question 4. Does your town have residential building and site development standards that accommodate and encourage solar power development? For example: rooftop solar load capacity.

- A. Yes, solar standards are included in our building and site development standards, and we have amended zoning to enable and promote solar energy installations. +3
- B. Solar standards are encouraged, but not required. +2
- C. Solar standards are not considered or encouraged during the review process. +1

Worksheet 6: Promote Renewable Energy and Transmission Development Balanced with the Community's Goals for Land Use (Continued)

Question 5. Has your town developed clear policies for where to build renewable energy projects?

- A. Yes, we have identified and mapped areas where we want to promote or discourage renewable energy projects (such as wind or solar) based on community goals and natural resource considerations. We have clear policies in our town plan to achieve those goals. +3
- B. We have identified areas that are or are not viable for commercial scale renewable development, but there are no maps or town plan policies. +2
- C. We have not developed maps or policies related to commercial-scale renewable energy development. +1

Question 6. Has your town developed clear policies for siting large-scale, interstate transmission development?

- A. Yes, we have identified and mapped areas where we want to promote or discourage transmission projects based on community goals and natural resource considerations. We have clear policies in our town plan to achieve those goals. +3
- B. We have identified areas that are or are not viable for transmission development, but there are no maps or town plan policies. +2
- C. We have not developed maps or policies related to transmission development. +1

Question 7. Has your town developed clear policies to ensure the town has access to reliable and resilient power from the power grid?

- A. Yes, we have identified clear policies to promote grid reliability and resiliency. +3
- B. We have identified the need for access to reliable and resilient power, but lack resources to define policies. +2
- C. We have not developed policies related to reliability and resiliency. +1

Scoring

- 13-21 Resilient Community
- 7-12 Transitioning Community
- 1-6 Community Needs Attention

Depending on your community's score, you and your partners may have some important work to do to improve readiness—or resilience—for effective engagement on renewable energy and transmission projects.

Suggested Steps for Building Resilience with your Town and Local Decision Makers:

- Create residential and site development standards to facilitate more rapid and strategic development of renewable energy and transmission infrastructure.
- Identify optimal locations for well-suited community renewable projects and begin exploring financing options.
- Share renewable energy success stories to inspire others. Host a 'visioning' session.
- Explore your community's renewable energy potential with regulators and utilities.
- Identify and meet with experts to learn more about power grid reliability and resiliency.

Worksheet 7: Community Benefit Agreements and Plans

Once your community has assessed your renewable energy and transmission needs, as well as local conservation and working lands priorities, it could be a great next step to consider creating a Community Benefit Agreement or Plan. These agreements or plans are excellent ways to formalize your community's vision for resilience. Even if you decide that you're not ready to implement a Community Benefit Agreement or Plan it can be helpful to go through the planning process. Engaging in the planning process can help your local community determine what steps are needed to seek state or federal funding, identify community or corporate partners, and key elements that are important for ensuring equitable access to renewable energy.

A Community Benefit Agreement (CBA) is a voluntary but legally binding agreement between a developer or company and nearby community organizations that directs benefits from new development projects to local people. These benefits vary based on a community's needs; they can include employment provisions, new infrastructure, and resources for the community such as affordable housing, public parks, job training programs, and/or measures to protect the environment. CBAs are negotiated prior to government approval of a project. In some cases, a local or state agency may play an active role in negotiations and can act as an enforcer of an agreement.

A Community Benefit Plan is a non-legally binding roadmap for how a developer will engage with communities during a project. While they do not always include designated funding or enforcement mechanisms, CBPs can help pave the way for future, legally binding community benefits agreements by laying some of the groundwork and bringing stakeholders together early on. The Department of Energy requires Community Benefits Plans for Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act funding opportunity announcements and loan applications.

Tips for Accurate Scoring

- Review town plan, zoning, and subdivision regulations.

Question 1. Does your town share contact information for experts and state and regional regulators with community members to inform discussions of policies and town plans?

- A. Yes, the town has relationships with experts and state and regional regulators and frequently shares these to ensure equal access to information for all. +3
- B. Yes, but these relationships are not shared frequently. +2
- C. No, we do not have these relationships, or we do not typically share these connections. +1

Question 2. Do you know who the big energy users are in your community? Examples may include the town library, local co-operative, and a local chain restaurant.

- A. Yes, we identified who are the big energy users, and we have a working relationship with them. +3
- B. Yes, we have identified who are the big energy users, but we do not have a working relationship with them. +2
- C. No, we have not identified who are the big energy users in the community. +1

Question 3. Do the town and all community members know what are Community Benefit Agreements or Community Benefit Plans?

- A. Yes. +3
- B. No. +0

Worksheet 7: Community Benefit Agreements and Plans (Continued)

Question 4. Does the town plan list principles or goals that can guide a community in negotiating a Community Benefit Agreement or a Community Benefit Plan?

- A. Yes. +3
- B. Some of the principles or goals are listed in the town plan, but they are not updated often or are not clear enough to guide discussions around a Community Benefit Agreement. +2
- C. No. +1

Question 5. If the town plan lists principles or goals that can guide a community in negotiating a Community Benefit Agreement or a Community Benefit Plan, are these representative of the needs of community subsets, such as minority-owned businesses?

- A. Yes. +3
- B. No. +0

Question 6. Does your town's planning process engage and consider adjacent towns and the regional context?

- A. Yes, we regularly engage neighboring towns in our planning process and actively consider the region in our decisions. + 3
- B. We consider the regional context and sometimes engage neighboring towns. + 2
- C. We notify neighboring towns and review the plan's compatibility with neighboring towns. +1
- D. We do not interact with neighboring towns or consider regional context. +0

Scoring

- 13-18 Resilient Community
- 7-12 Community In Transition
- 1-6 Community Needs Attention

Depending on your community's score, you and your partners may have some important work to do to improve readiness—or resilience—for effective engagement on renewable energy and transmission projects.

Suggested Steps for Building Resilience with your Town and Local Decision Makers:

- Reach out to the Grid Deployment Office at the Department of Energy to learn more about the requirements for Community Benefits Plans for transmission.
- Review the [Community Benefit Agreement Toolkit](#) from the Office of Energy and Equity at the Department of Energy.
- Review [RelImagine Appalachia's Community Benefits Virtual Summit](#) to learn more.
- Reach out to the Office of Energy and Equity at the Department of Energy for more information.

Next Steps and Resources

- Identify key partners to help you build a team of supporters.
- Attend a town meeting or meet with the local energy committee and present your findings.
- Work with your local National Wildlife Federation Affiliate.

Find your local affiliate by visiting affiliates.nwf.org/affiliate-directory

- Find more resources in the NWF Transmission Toolkit at nwf.org/transmission



LEARN MORE

www.nwf.org/transmission