# Empowering Communities in Transmission Development

**To meet evolving consumer energy needs, the U.S. must significantly expand its electric transmission infrastructure. Historically, large-scale projects have often ignored local input, resulting in unfair system designs and community distrust. To address community concerns, balance project impacts and reduce opposition, we can establish a development process that engages communities early through Community Benefit Frameworks.**

## Aligning energy development with local value

Transitioning to a clean energy economy in the U.S. requires a massive upgrade to our electrical grid, meaning thousands of miles of new transmission lines crisscrossing the nation. Historically, these large-scale projects have often overlooked community input, leading to unfair outcomes and strong local opposition. While communities may not always be able to stop a project, their resistance can lead to significant delays and cost increases, potentially derailing crucial transmission development.

Bringing communities into the development process from the start helps shape project design and ensures infrastructure is built more efficiently and equitably. Frameworks that allow communities to benefit from projects demonstrate respect for potentially impacted communities and recognize the scope of any harmful activities. These frameworks aren't a panacea; their impact hinges on developers' good faith engagement and communities' resources to participate.

## Measuring what matters: tangible benefits

Environmental Defense Fund and Clean Air Task Force will release a report this fall analyzing transmission projects across the United States that integrated community benefit frameworks during their project development.

Through detailed document review and first-person interviews, research will explore:

- **Nature of the framework:** What specific benefits were included?
- **Process to agreement:** How did developers and communities reach an agreement?
- **Community representation:** Who represented the community's interests?
- **Impact & effectiveness:** To what extent did the framework deliver genuine benefits and influence project timelines and costs?

> ***"Building our clean energy future efficiently and equitably hinges on prioritizing community trust, transforming potential opposition into accelerated, essential progress."*** *– Adam Kurkland, Attorney, Federal Energy, Environmental Defense Fund*


## Community benefit agreements ease the way

The United States urgently needs to expand its transmission infrastructure to meet rising electricity demand, improve grid reliability and integrate renewable energy sources. Yet building these lines is time consuming and difficult as projects spanning hundreds of miles cross state lines, face complex permitting and cost allocation hurdles, and often encounter strong local opposition due to potential community impacts.

Tools like community benefit agreements and the broader community benefit framework can help offer a way to build trust, address local concerns and navigate these challenges.

## Case study: Vineyard Wind 1 in Barnstable, MA

Vineyard Offshore's project Vineyard Wind 1, located off the coast of Massachusetts, is a commercial offshore wind energy facility that will include 62 turbines generating 800 megawatts of wind power.

Two transmission cables run along the seabed from the turbines and come onshore at Covell's Beach in Barnstable, Massachusetts. These cables connect an offshore substation with an existing substation located onshore at Hyannis. Under Massachusetts law at the time the cables were planned, Barnstable retained siting authority over projects sited on public land, including roads and beaches.

Starting in 2016, a full year before formal permit applications were filed in 2017, Vineyard Offshore hosted and approximately 100 public events to help ensure the project was well understood and community members had a chance to discuss concerns.

At the same time, the Town of Barnstable worked closely with the developer to put in place the contours of a binding Host Community Agreement (HCA). The agreement was finalized through a series of regular biweekly meetings with the town in 2018.

An HCA is a legally binding contract between a wind energy developer and a local community. It details project specifics and the benefits the community will receive. For example, Barnstable's HCA precisely outlined turbine placement, infrastructure like cables and substations, and the specific benefits the community would gain by hosting the wind farm.

The Vineyard Offshore-Barnstable HCA provided the town with financial commitments as well as support for infrastructure commitments to the town's sewer system, and groundwater safety assurances. The agreement also specified mitigation measures, including siting transmission cables underground along existing rights-of-way such as public roadways, minimizing work during certain seasons and restoring disturbed areas.

With the HCA in place, Vineyard Offshore received authorization to move forward with the project. To date, Vineyard Wind 1 is sending more than 200 megawatts of power to Massachusetts from 17 turbines, with the full 800 megawatts of power expected to be reached by the end of 2025.

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