

**REGIONAL ROUNDTABLE: BUILDING A THRIVING, CLEAN AND EQUITABLE ECONOMY  
IN ARIZONA**

**August 10-11, 2021**

**Overall takeaways**

- The impacts of climate change are already being felt across Arizona, including in extreme heat, wildfire, and water shortages. The need to invest in clean energy and climate resilience is essential, if not existential, to the state's long-term future.
- Investments in clean energy are key to Arizona's long-term competitiveness. Companies are increasingly concerned with sustainability factors, and many seek assurances from cities and states where they locate that they can meet their climate and clean energy goals there.
- Arizona has abundant resources to leverage for its energy transition: significant solar potential, rapidly growing technology industries, a skilled workforce, entrepreneurial spirit, and more.
- Arizona's communities have diverse needs, whether in urban areas, rural areas, or tribal nations, and what works in certain places may not work in others. Localized approaches are needed and must be informed by local stakeholder input.
- All communities – especially the most vulnerable – need to be involved in decision-making about investments in infrastructure and economic development. These communities have borne a disproportionate burden of impacts from both climate change and the transition to a clean economy, but often lack the time and resources to access decision-making processes.
- Approaches to infrastructure, clean energy, coal closures, and climate resilience have so far been piecemeal and often led by individual organizations or cities. There is a need for statewide cohesion and planning to address these issues proactively and collaboratively.

**Session 1: Investing in power infrastructure for a robust, low-carbon economy**

- A statewide conversation on Arizona's energy transition and infrastructure agenda is sorely needed. Greater collaboration is needed among stakeholders, including the Corporation Commission, elected officials, private sector, and local, tribal, and state government.
- Infrastructure and energy needs are very different in rural and urban areas. Plans must be localized and informed by stakeholder input to address unique community needs and wishes.
- Companies are setting corporate goals around sustainability and the use of clean energy. To continue attracting investments, Arizona will need to ensure that companies can access clean energy – while maintaining reliability and affordability – to help them meet their goals.
- Arizona has the resources to provide abundant access to clean energy, including nuclear generation, solar, energy storage, biomass, and green hydrogen. This clean energy can be key to growing low-carbon technology and transportation industries in the state.
- Arizona's transmission system can enable it to export solar energy to other Western states, but more coordination is needed among the regional grid to realize that potential. Ensuring transmission projects create economic benefits for local communities must also be a priority.
- Urban heat, wildfires, drought, and other climate impacts already affect all Arizonans. The state must ensure its infrastructure is climate resilient, to ensure long-term livability.

- As low-carbon technologies and solutions become more available, ensuring all communities can equitably access them, and the economic and environmental benefits they create, will be a key task for policymakers.
- Local and vulnerable communities need to be involved early in decision-making processes on energy and climate issues. Ensuring this access, including by providing resources to engage in regulatory procedures, should be a priority for policymakers.
- Arizona's human resources are a significant asset, but investments are needed to train a clean energy workforce and ensure students and others can find work in the clean energy economy.

## **Session 2: Supporting equity in Arizona's energy transition**

- Transitional communities in Arizona are diverse, and the state's carbon economy is not limited to coal. The unique needs of tribal nations, rural communities, communities facing energy poverty, small businesses, and other vulnerable groups need to be prioritized.
- Coal communities have fueled economic growth throughout Arizona. These contributions need to be recognized and valued in making decisions about the energy transition.
- Tribal consultation, consent and sovereignty should be upheld throughout transition efforts.
- The Arizona Corporation Commission should work with stakeholders, including affected communities, to develop a systematized plan for closures of fossil facilities in the state.
- Cities have been leaders in planning for clean energy and climate resilience in Arizona. The state lacks an overarching strategy that can facilitate accelerated progress, and tribes need support and resources to undertake their own strategic planning for clean energy development.
- All levels of government have a role in Arizona's energy transition, including by updating building codes, zoning, and pursuing energy efficiency locally; creating plans, standards, and incentives for clean energy at the state level; and supporting large investments federally.
- A statewide energy office could be the focal point for these issues and assist in directing money from federal programs to support power and infrastructure projects, address just transition concerns, and more.
- Retired fossil fuel infrastructure can be a resource in the energy transition: plants can be retrofitted, and existing transmission lines used for clean power projects.
- There are myriad barriers to investing in transitional communities in Arizona, including poor access to broadband and cell service; workforce needs; lack of road infrastructure; double taxation on tribal lands; lack of understanding of tribal processes by outsiders; and interjurisdictional challenges arising on tribal lands between multiple agencies.
- Diversification is key to creating resilient economies in all communities, but especially transitional communities. Relying on a single new industry or energy source to replace another does nothing to address long-term vulnerability. New projects should be designed to produce local benefits, including access to clean energy, employment, and other relevant benefits.
- Transitional communities can pilot innovative energy approaches, such as community solar, microgrids, advanced nuclear, green hydrogen, and energy storage, to supply clean, reliable power, meet community energy needs, and boost economic activity.
- Workforce development is key to helping communities thrive in a low-carbon economy, but programs must go beyond basic competency to enable growth into advanced positions.