

Stakeholder Comment on the CETA Principles of Community Engagement

RMI

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Introduction

RMI recognizes meaningful community engagement as an essential element of any effort to expand transmission capacity. We therefore appreciate the care CETA has taken to develop the proposed community engagement principles through a public process. We support the principles' thematic focus and believe the principles offer a strong first iteration to build upon.

In these comments, we offer considerations for their refinement and implementation. Our suggestions focus on the following three areas to strengthen the principles:

- 1. Define concepts to support implementation,**
- 2. Identify accountability mechanisms, and**
- 3. Consider use of an intermediary to aid in community engagement**

Define Concepts for Implementation

We believe ensuring the principles' effective implementation requires that CETA establish clearly defined, concrete, and replicable criteria and procedures in the instances of ambiguous language we identify below.

Cross-cutting

We suggest CETA provide definitional guidelines for the following phrases that appear in Principle 1 and 2: “affected stakeholders”, “diverse community interest groups”, “all affected interests”, and “marginalized or underrepresented groups within the community.”

It is thematically clear that CETA seeks to promote inclusive processes with diverse community perspectives, but the current language could more clearly articulate who should be included. Defining terminology will provide clarity for developers and tracking that requirements have been met.

We recognize that these definitions will require flexibility to respond to local contexts but believe they remain important for establishing concrete and replicable procedures. We recommend the use of screening tools, such as the Council on Environmental Quality’s [Climate & Economic Justice Screening Tool](#) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s [Index of Federal Mapping Tools Related to Environmental Justice and Sustainability](#). Additionally, we suggest CETA consider examples such as RMI’s forthcoming Stakeholder Analysis and Mapping (S.A.M) Tool, which is scheduled to be released mid-August 2024. These tools can support the identification of relevant and diverse stakeholders across different community contexts.

Principle 1: Require a transparent, credible, and open process.

RMI suggests CETA define the “impacts” that CETA partners will be required to inform the public about. Additionally, we believe CETA should specify what meaningfully constitutes “regular and timely” updates on the project’s status.

We would caution that requiring updates too frequently can result in communities being inundated with excessive and thus inaccessible amounts of information, as well as present an administrative burden for developers. We contend that it is beneficial for all parties if the criteria for the “regular and timely” requirement aim for quality and digestible information over a maximum quantity.

Principle 2: Require meaningful engagement with local communities.

We suggest CETA use the principles to set a higher standard than consultation, and instead strongly encourage and incentivize comprehensive collaboration with Tribal governments.

There are successful examples of collaborative relationships with Tribal nations that accelerate transmission capacity expansion, alongside tribal energy sovereignty (See for example the [Morongo Band of Mission Indians’ partnership](#) with Southern California Edison, and the [Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs’ partnership](#) with Portland General Electric). Transmission and related infrastructure, such as substations, outside of sovereign Tribal lands can also be an opportunity to support tribal economic development and energy sovereignty goals.

Principle 3: Advocate for public resources and both financial and non-financial benefits that support local communities.

With respect to landowner compensation, we suggest CETA articulate a concrete definition of “fair and equitable compensation.”

While we agree with CETA that local communities, including impacted landowners, should tangibly benefit from hosting transmission projects and have sufficient resources to participate in project proposal and siting processes, we also recognize “fair” and “equitable” can be broadly conceived. We believe a clear definition can engender more alignment in industry practice and outcomes.

Identify Accountability Mechanisms

We suggest that CETA provide an instructive, performance-based approach for the implementation of its community engagement minimum requirements.

A performance-based approach goes beyond a compliance focused framework by setting performance metrics, providing best-practice guidelines to developers, and potentially incentivizing developers through a competitive approach such as a solicitation or other application process to meet the set standards.

An example of a competitive approach is the U.S. Department of Energy’s (DOE) process to solicit and evaluate applications for its [Grid Resilience and Partnerships \(GRIP\) Program](#).

The following sections catalog our suggestions of performance metrics and mechanisms that ensure accountability:

Principle 2, Require meaningful engagement with local communities

- “Comprehensive Engagement Plans”: **Identify the entity that will review the Plans.** This is important for considering the entity best suited to the needs of the principles’ implementation and for the purpose of accountability.
- “Comprehensive Engagement Plans”: **Identify the evaluation approach that will be used.** This is needed to create a transparent process for communities and developers alike. It will clearly signal to developers what CETA deems important and support public trust in the process.
- “Comprehensive Engagement Plans”: **Specify how updated plans and methods will be reviewed.**
- “Land Agent Code of Conduct”: **We suggest CETA codify stronger requirements and identify a mechanism for independent oversight of land agent conduct.** CETA only states that it will “instruct” land agents to be respectful, forthright, and truthful. Anecdotally land agent conduct features among the reasons for local opposition to energy infrastructure, therefore more binding language could support better project outcomes.

Principle 4, Require long term commitments to host communities.

- **Identify who will be responsible for ensuring accountability for these commitments** over the agreed upon term and how they will hold developers accountable. Given the long useful life of transmission assets, enforcing long-term commitments presents unique challenges that require CETA's consideration.
- **Identify the recourse that communities, or CETA, will have if these commitments are not fulfilled.**

Consider use of an intermediary to aid in community engagement

Following the recommended best practice [presented by Keith Bergthold](#) at CETA's Board of Directors Study Session – Community Engagement Toolkit consider the use of an intermediary, contracted by CETA to avoid conflicts of interest.

Conclusion

RMI commends CETA for its commitment to advancing meaningful community engagement through the proposed principles. RMI recognizes and respects that CETA is still evolving as an entity and identifying the roles that are most appropriate for it to fill.

As CETA continues to refine the proposed principles, we suggest identifying and soliciting more robust participation from community organizations.

Ultimately, we believe the principles' effective implementation relies on CETA erecting structures that can balance the need to ensure communities are proactively and meaningfully engaged with the need to accelerate transmission capacity expansion.