



Tribal Energy Alternatives  
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Submitted to:  
U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs

Submitted by:  
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**RE: Response to Questions for the Record Oversight Hearing: “Tribal Natural Resource Development: Barriers and Successes,” April 22, 2026**

The following responses are submitted on behalf of Tribal Energy Alternatives (“TEA”) in response to Questions for the Record submitted by Representative Adelita S. Grijalva following the April 22, 2026 oversight hearing titled “Tribal Natural Resource Development: Barriers and Successes.”

**Question 1: Rep. Grijalva – Ms. Martin, you spoke to the importance of workforce development in ensuring energy investments translate into economic opportunities for tribal communities, and about your work building local capacity through training initiatives. Building on examples like the Gila River Indian Community solar project, how can distributed energy projects not only provide reliable and affordable power, but also serve as a foundation for workforce development, skills training, and long-term career pathways within tribal communities? And these benefits extend well beyond energy production alone, correct? Can you speak to how projects like these contribute to broader community resilience, economic development, and tribal self-determination?**

Distributed energy projects in Tribal communities serve far more than energy infrastructure investments; they function as catalysts for workforce development, local economic participation, and long-term community capacity building. When solar projects are paired with intentional and culturally resonant workforce development opportunities, community members gain energy skills and literacy to continue the work forward in their own communities.

At Tribal Energy Alternatives, our work focuses on tying workforce development into projects, not as a separate add-on to clean energy development. TEA’s employment of local trainees provides hands-on



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safety, electrical, and installation training for entry-level and experienced construction workers. This approach creates long-term career pathways driving Tribes to retain and build upon their own technical expertise locally, rather than relying exclusively on outside contractors.

This is especially important where Tribal communities have significantly higher energy burdens, reside in rural geographies, and have historically been underinvested in infrastructure and workforce development. Distributed energy projects help to reverse these systemic disadvantages, with local employment opportunities connected to long-term priorities of the community.

In Indian Country, workforce development success cannot be solely based on immediate job placement numbers. It must also include increased energy literacy in a community, building confidence in community members to better understand technical fields, expanded educational programming at Tribal colleges and universities, and exposure for Tribal youth to new long-term career pathways. This brings us well beyond energy production alone. Ultimately, these projects reduce household energy costs, expand career pathway development for Tribal members, strengthen local resilience, and increase Tribal governments' ability to shape their own energy futures.

**Question 2: Rep. Grijalva – Expanding on that, why is reliable access to federal resources, including funding, tax incentives, and technical assistance, so critical when developing energy projects in Indian Country? In particular, how has the Inflation Reduction Act changed the landscape for tribal energy development, and what lessons can we draw from successful projects, like Gila River, about the importance of long-term policy certainty?**

Reliable access to federal funding, incentives, and technical assistance remains critical for Tribal energy development because Tribal Nations have faced barriers that private markets alone have failed to address. These barriers include limited access to capital, frayed relationships between the Tribal government and utility providers, limited investment in rural areas with Tribal Nations, and lack of expertise around energy development. Rural Tribes experience the most significant infrastructure costs when compared to other areas. Federal resources are often necessary to close that gap.

The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) significantly changed the landscape for Tribes in energy development by creating more financing pathways and incentives for energy deployment. Federal action created access to tools like direct pay, clean energy for residences, and green bank investment, to make distributed energy projects that were previously difficult to fund, more viable for Tribal Nations. As the energy demand increases, energy projects are becoming more expensive and rate payers are experiencing higher energy burden. By combining federal and state grants, and more importantly leveraging tax credits, renewable energy benefits would've impacted more residential homes and tribal communities than ever seen before. Furthermore, monetizing tax credits eliminated the need for upfront capital costs, allowing Tribes to reinvest any savings from solar investment, back into their communities.



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Equally important, these federal programs provided a level of policy certainty that allowed Tribes, nonprofit organizations, and developers to invest time, financial resources, and staff capacity into long-term project planning. Stable federal policy provides more assurance to Tribes in order to build projects strategically rather than under the stress and uncertainty of limited funding windows and federal support.

One of the greatest takeaways from the Solar For All program termination is that policy instability greatly harms communities and their progress to sustainable and independent energy futures. Tribal governments and organizations, including TEA, invested substantial time and planning into what it would take to administer and remain compliant in a program like Solar For All. Sudden changes in federal funding stranded several Tribal projects under development, and created uncertainty and strained trust between federal agencies, coalition partners, and communities pursuing these grant opportunities. Tribes and organizations are left with exploring replacement funding for the abandoned residential projects due to the reversal of federally obligated funds.

Long-term certainty is of great importance in Indian Country, the Federal Trust responsibility requires deeper investments to provide the resources for Tribes to build their energy systems from the ground up. This includes workforce opportunities, technical expertise internally within the Tribe, and local implementation capacity. Consistent federal support allows these support systems to mature and scale over time, and TEA remains committed to being a part of that ecosystem.

**Question 3: Lastly, Tribal Energy Alternatives has worked to strengthen tribally led solutions in the clean energy transition by providing funding support, technical expertise, workforce training, and project development assistance. Can you speak more about how your organization helps address gaps in federal support for tribal renewable energy projects? And what additional tools, policies, or resources are needed to ensure more communities can replicate the kind of success we've seen with the Gila River Indian Community solar project?**

Tribal Energy Alternatives works to help bridge these gaps between Tribal Nations in renewable energy development. In practice, this translates to supporting nearly every stage of project development, rather than focusing solely on deployment. Our dedicated programs within our organization provide Tribes with grants, workforce development, policy, and construction and installation of solar energy— all of which is anchored in our deep experience in working with Tribal governments. TEA fundraising from philanthropic donors and proposal development efforts for federal grants awarded to Tribes have led to over \$25 million in grants to Tribes. Tribes utilized these grants for energy planning, residential and community solar projects and hiring local workforce for installing, operation, and maintenance of rooftop, ground and pole mounted solar energy systems. Through the deployment of grants and project development, TEA technical experts provide no-cost technical assistance to Tribes for engineering and design, utility interconnection, infrastructure inspections, tribal and state regulatory compliance. To date,



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we have worked with over 75 Tribal Nations, ensuring that all project development is well-aligned with their cultural, environmental and economic goals for installing renewable energy.

One of the major gaps in the current federal landscape is that many programs assume communities have the technical assistance measures and staff capacity to move projects beyond pre-development phases. In reality, with the infrastructure challenges, housing gaps, and workforce development needs of Tribes, substantially greater investment is needed to support Tribal implementation capacity. We see technical assistance of equal importance with direct project funding.

The following are TEA's recommendations for federal support in key areas:

- Invest in Tribal-specific workforce development and apprenticeship pathways directly related to clean energy deployment. Workforce funding is often separate from project implementation, stalling long-term training pipelines.
- Invest in distribution upgrades, storage deployment and utility interconnection assistance for Tribes to access renewable energy development. In many cases, the largest obstacles often come from costs associated with interconnecting to the grid and grid infrastructure upgrades.
- Ensure that federal programs with direct funding pathways allow Tribes to exercise sovereignty during project and program design along with long-term program implementation.
- Maintain long-term federal clean energy funding and policy stability so Tribal communities can plan, build, and sustain projects over time.

The success of projects, like the Gila River Indian Community solar initiative which is just one of several project successes across Indian Country, relied on local-based knowledge of needs, which led to improved affordability and resilience and strengthening of Tribal self-determination.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these responses and for the Committee's continued attention to Tribal energy development and Tribal self-determination.

Respectfully submitted,

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