



Exploring Community Benefits Alongside Former DOE Officials: Achievements, Challenges, and What Lies Ahead

Webinar

May 21, 2026

TRANSCRIPT BEGINS

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Hello, everyone. Thank you for joining us today for a webinar on exploring community benefits alongside former DOE officials

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achievements, challenges, and what lies ahead

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will get started momentarily.

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I can see a few more folks joining us today. So if you have just joined us, welcome. And thank you for coming to today's webinar on exploring community benefits alongside a former DOU officials

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achievements, challenges in what lies ahead.

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We are going to wait another minute and then we will get things started.

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Okay, let's get this started. As usual, we will start with some housekeeping

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messages. If you have audio problems, you can join by phone, by phone at 305-224-1968. Webinarid

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All participants will be muted during the webinar. If you have any questions for our panelists, you may enter them in the Q&A box at the bottom of your screen.

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The webinar is being recorded and will be shared after the event.

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And as always, members of the press may be joining today's webinar

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My name is Federico Holm, and I am a research scientist at the Center for Progressive Reform. Welcome.

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Today's topic is community benefits plans.

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Briefly put, a CVP is a plan demonstrating how an entity or developer will ensure that a proposed project provides benefits to workers and community members.

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In this webinar, we will engage with former U.S. Department of Energy officials to explore how community benefits plans provided a coherent framework and played a key role tying together climate, energy, labor, and DEIJ goals during the Biden-Harris administration

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We will assess the obstacles that emerged during implementation and how to address these challenges in the future.

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Thank you again for joining us

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During this webinar, you will hear from three leading voices, Shalonda Baker, who is the inaugural Vice Provost for Sustainability and Climate Action at the University of Michigan

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Before joining Sholando served as the Senate-confirmed director of the Office of Energy Justice and Equity, Secretarial Advisor on Equity, and Chief Diversity Officer at the U.S. Department of Energy.

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At the department, she served as the architect of the agency's equity and justice efforts.

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Prior to that, she served in the Biden-Harris administration as the nation's first deputy director for energy justice.

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Next is Pett Jones, senior fellow at the Roosevelt Institute and senior policy research advisor on the Green Economy at the UC Berkeley Labor Center.

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During the Biden-Harris administration, Bethany served as director of the Office of Energy Jobs and Senior Advisor for labor to the secretary at the US Department of Energy

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She co-designed and implemented the department's community benefits plan framework for use across projects totaling hundreds of billions in federal investments.

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And finally, Sarah Wiley, Associate Professor of Sociology Anthropology and Health Sciences at Northeastern University.

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Within the Office of Energy Justice and Equity, she advised and helped to conceptualize a data framework for tracking the impacts of CBPs, developed metrics for measuring the flow of benefits to communities and standardized data reporting

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She also advised offices implementing CBPs and Justice40 initiative such as the Office of Clean Energy Demonstrations, Fossil Energy and Carbon Management, and

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Sorry, the geothermal Energy Office and Hydrogen fuel technologies, among others.

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I will be moderating the panel and keeping time. We probably have more questions than we have time for, but we will do our best, or the panelists will do their best. I will take no credit on that.

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The webinar will take the form of an extended Q&A, and there will be time at the end for the panelists to address the questions from the audience.

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So

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Let's get started

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The first discussion question is, how did the idea of a community benefits framework emerge at DOE? Shalanda, why don't you start?

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Thank you so much. I'm so excited to be here again with some old friends from DOE. We're dusting off some of the wounds that we endured during our few years together in the Biden-Harris administration. So it's really delightful to be here

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I'd love to hear Betti's

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impression of this question. In my view, the community benefits framework really emerged from what seemed to be some competing tensions among kind of the equity work and the Justice 40 work that my office was leading

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The labor work, which didn't always sort of neatly fit within the equity frameworks that we were working on, and this idea that we needed to get everyone across the agency on board with both of those elements. And so

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The Secretary Jennifer Granholm is an incredible leader. Anyone who's had a chance to work with her, I think, would agree. And she basically

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Tap to me, tap that knee, and tap to third person. Kate, whose last name, I don't know why, it's just slipped through my brain

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Go, feel free to

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Hey, Gordon.

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Take Gordon, that's right. Kate Gordon to be a part of a triad of leaders thinking about how to integrate equity, labor and justice throughout all of our DOE programs. And just as a reminder and a data point.

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After the passage of the Bipartisan infrastructure law, we had about \$60 billion in new programs that were going to be designed and developed in real time. And then after the Inflation Reduction Act, that number swelled to around \$100 billion in new programs and new funding opportunities

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And so we were the architects. We got to sit at the table and really hash out how we were going to move benefits to communities. And so, throughout those early discussions, this idea of community benefits

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agreements came up, and so we debated whether that was realistic, and then we sort of came to the conclusion that community benefits planning would be the next best, result. And so, we got to work thinking about

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The elements of that, and which I hope we talk about, but it was always complicated, and for me, it was a little bit of a compromise in the sense that

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We were bringing projects to communities and saying

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Now that this project is going to happen, what benefits would you like? Instead of sort of starting from the place of communities, what is your hope? What are your hopes and dreams about your community? And let's fit in industrial development around that. So,

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So that's my origin story for this, but I'd love to hear from everyone else.

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Yeah, I think that of course that lays it out really effectively. I'll just add a few things.

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The President Biden had some really clear policy priorities that were entrenched in some really powerful executive orders. And those included

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things like how we executed on the climate crisis had to address long standing equity and justice issues, and also had to create good, ideally union jobs and pathways into them

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And he laid out this whole-of-government approach for doing those things. It was informed by, of course, the politics around climate policy generally, and who advocated and expended political capital to get

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Some of these policies across the finish line in Congress in the first place after really decades of failed attempts. So there was this effort to tie

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equity and labor principles to our climate investments. It was a very clear presidential priority and something that Secretary Granholm took really seriously

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But for the funding that came to DOE, there was very little, I would say next to nothing in the statutory language that gave us direction on how to execute those priorities. And so we were constrained by what the legislation

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Directed DOE to do, which was allocating funding across, I think 72 different programs, many of which, most of which were new programs

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Setting up new program offices. And this was a huge influx of money to DOE for actually delivering on infrastructure projects. This was an organization that was traditionally an R&D organization. You know, you think the national labs and innovation and

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The research and development arena, and now all of a sudden we had funding to implement real projects in real places that would have real

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community impacts, and we had to figure out both how to address these policy priorities, but also

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How to execute these large projects effectively. And with some speed, because that was the imperative. It felt like a, you know, a sprint. It felt like a marathon, but it was also a sprint, because we felt a really strong

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need to deliver on these clean energy investments in the time that we had. So what Shalonda relayed about Secretary Granholm's leadership and pulling us together to figure it out is exactly right. I would also add that we were working

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Really, really quickly. The first, the bipartisan infrastructure law, also known as Ijia, passed and the first and one of the programs for battery supplies was

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had to be released in 60 days. That means the whole program had to be developed, the funding guidelines developed and rolled out in 60 days. That is not a lot of time. And so we were scrambling to figure out how do we advance these

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These policy goals in a way that's responsive to the needs of projects on the ground. And we, you know, realize that working together on that was gonna move us further, faster than if we were all individually advocating for our piece of the

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you know, administration's policy priorities. And so that's how the community benefits plan framework emerged as sort of an umbrella to address these things that were both policy priorities, but also, you know, fundamental risks to project execution

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Community opposition, like Shalanda said, we didn't have the time to figure out what is the path that communities would like to see, what is their sense of place, what is their vision for themselves as a community? So a lot of it was like thinking about how do we

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mitigate the harms and try to ensure that some of these benefits of these projects are flowing to communities and ensure that these private sector recipients of federal money have baked in accountability to the communities that they're impacting. And so that was... those were the different imperatives that we were trying to balance

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in creating this overarching framework.

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I really like the metaphors that you've brought up here, Betti, of it being a sprint, because it helps contextualize when I joined in. So I kind of joined part of this marathon after the community benefits framework

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had been largely developed and was part of attempting to

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actually make that the process by which awards were reviewed and then by which funding decisions were made which is a huge lift in and of itself, bringing people in who are literate in community and environmental justice and work

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issues to read and review community benefit plans to introduce to developers this fundamentally kind of new model about how they need to describe their social and economic value and make the case for their projects for how it's going to build sustainable

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community. And so it was a very interesting challenge to be drawn into trying to design a data system and build the pipeline that moved these things physically through the agency.

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And I come at energy systems from an academic background. So I'm also really interested in what issues the community benefit plans we're trying to address, which as Shalonda mentioned, this is an R&D agency, right?

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Well, and suddenly it's building this massive infrastructure and these infrastructure projects that were both highly detailed and highly networked, like the hydrogen hubs, which really attempted to build a vision for what a heterogeneous energy future looked like

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For the US and in addressing that problem, we ran into the issue that

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You know, these systems are still experimental systems, and if you look at the technical systems that are energy systems have depended on historically, they have this characteristic of enclaving themselves, which means, particularly if you look at the history of the oil and gas industry

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In non-U.S. contexts where you create an enclave of wealth and technical control, and in some cases physical power generation, right? But that enclave isn't heavily networked to the community where it's placed

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It's not necessarily building community jobs. It's not bringing in labor from those particular places, and they tend to exacerbate and create the conditions of inequality. And so the community benefit plans was, from my perspective, a very elegant way

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of attempting to embed this whole new energy infrastructure in a system that was making its claim to the public for what is the value to your community and what is the value for your

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For both economically and environmentally and socially, and from a sustainability perspective. So it was a really interesting experiment in trying to bridge this

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divide, I think, that is often used with environmental systems between labor and environmental health and environmental justice issues. And that was one of the most exciting and challenging parts of trying to design this system is one that did functionally say, no, you know, we want an industry that's responsible

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for the kind of community and society that it builds. And so I, yeah, thank you, Shalonda, for drawing me into this discussion.

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But I just want to underscore one thing that Bettany mentioned to offer the context

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So

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We were redesigning the agency

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The agency was being redesigned under our feet. We were hiring hundreds of people

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And we were at the same time trying to build new programs where, in the ideal world for many of our colleagues, it would have been a cut-and-paste exercise, where it's like, oh, we've done something similar to this, so we'll just cut and paste the documents that go out into the world, and we were saying, wait a minute

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This is development

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We've changed our mission as an agency, and so therefore, as Betty was saying, we have to do things differently. And so all of the documents

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That, were typically relied on to offer funding opportunities to the world, to industry, to academia. All of those had to be rethought and rewritten, and we had to do it quickly, and we had to convince our colleagues

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To trust us and to give it a shot. So, as Sarah said, it was an experiment. And thankfully, we did have excellent leadership, but we had to ram a lot through, which

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you know, was often a challenging endeavor. So I just wanted to give more context for the chaos of the moment we were in

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Thanks, Yolanda. And this actually, it's a perfect segue to our next question

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Which is, in your experience, could you tell us what worked well inside of DOE and what didn't? Bethany, do you want to start this question?

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Shalonda worked well inside of DOE and her team. The ramming through was really hard

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I won't speak for anybody else, but you know, you feel like you're the person where you enter the Zoom room, or the real room, and everybody kind of silently groans, because you're going to make them do something they don't want to do. So

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I will talk more first about some of the challenges and then kind of what I thought worked well or started to work well. The challenges would you know we were building this new agency from scratch, redesigning how it did things

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That just required a really significant cultural shift with the existing staff that just hadn't operated that way before. So building that trust

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that's a process, and we didn't have a lot of time. So that was challenging. I think what we saw happen is that once we came out with this framework, DOE attracted more talent and more people that were aligned with helping us try to figure out how to do it

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And so we... I noticed, personally, a shift where, you know, I was in all of these different rooms, DOE is a very collaborative place and just felt like the lone wolf

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crying out for, you know, these things that it was my job to advocate for. That did start to shift where people throughout the organization... I started to realize that I did have some allies, and I was able to build my team

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Shalanda was building her team with really talented, incredibly smart people like Sarah, who were really like dedicated to helping figure out how to do that socialization and education and TA with

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Program office people, and also build the systems to make it work. The hacking the bureaucracy of a, what, 100,000 person agency with a long history of doing something different is no easy feat, and we were really, really focused on

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I know this is going to sound silly now, but we were really focused on durability. How do we bake this in? How do we weave it into the very fabric of the organization?

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hack the DNA of the organization and make it stick. I think that in some ways, some of that has stuck, but obviously we weren't anticipating the total

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you know the the havoc. We anticipated havoc if there was a change in administration. I don't think we anticipated the full extent of it. So that was hard. It's not just editing documents, which after a day of back-to-back half hour meetings is... happens in the wee hours of

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Of night or dawn like this would... these were long days, like, scrambling to take everything that we'd learned and all of our experiences to date and put it down on paper in a way that was going to be executable, implementable, and implementable at scale across

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A huge number of different offices with their own cultures, a huge number of different programs dealing with different types of projects and different technologies. And

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And yet it shockingly, you know, it worked. It worked pretty well. And it's because, you know of a huge team of really dedicated people who would stick it out through the blood, sweat and tears

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Just every day make incremental progress.

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I mean, so I

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found that there was really earnest engagement in the officers that I worked with, and I worked with some very contentious technologies from both the workplace and an environmental health perspective. Hydrogen, carbon management. And what I saw in my two years there was

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A really quite incredible buildup of environmental justice staff, not just within our office, but within the other offices, that we're such a pleasure to work with, particularly within EERE, the hydrogen fuel cells office, and even in carbon management, I'll say, I think there was genuine

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Engagement in trying to give the community benefit plans their due, which meant training reviewers attempting to recruit reviewers with the right background, because most of the reviewer pool was all technical

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And then there was a real... we had these communities of practice across the agencies that our office ran to bring those different offices and their staff together to talk about implementation problems

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and share guidance and co-develop metrics that made sense across the offices for our different policy priorities. And so that was really, I think, in some ways, very effective conversations and cultural change

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really felt like it was happening. We had a great collaboration to build a community benefits plan forum, which was an activity for communities and developers to work through together to conceptualize community benefit plans. It's linked in

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chat here, it's still available through the Internet Archive, and it does a great job of showing the range of possible benefits and created a platform for communities and developers to get together and discuss from the community perspective

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What does this particular place, which has air quality problems, water contamination, losing in fears of loss of employment, how do we build a program that enriches this place that was really quite beautiful to share at community meetings and we co-developed that with Boston Museum of Science

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And so we were really developing the muscles, I think, to execute on the community benefit plans. And it really is a tragedy. Shalonda mentioned wounds, particularly now that some of these projects are going forward, that they aren't going forward with that framework

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Helping to sustain them is heartbreaking and there is so much that needs to be improved, and hopefully we can get more to that. I would love to chat about the ready initiative, Shalonda, but there just needed to be much more to support communities coming to the table

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In this work, I think

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I know.

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I want to do a whole day on this, like, can we... I feel like I'm finally ready. 24 months to kind of recover from everything that went down. I'll just add a couple other points to bring the human element into this

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So, on day one, I was at day one appointee, I got sworn in on Zoom with everybody else

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But on day 1, there were federal career staff ready to go, and, like, I was sort of absorbing my job, and there were people who were ready. And so, in some ways, the moment the Justice 40 moment, the equity moment, the labor moment

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was something a lot of people at the agency have been waiting for. So they were willing to kind of show the way. I can think of someone whose name I won't mention just because he's still in, and he was just such a champion of the work

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As a partner and an attorney helping to draft language. So... so there were many people who were ready, and then there were many people who were skeptical and cynical from the beginning as well. And so those are the folks

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Who gummed up the works? Who would sort of erect these... these straw men, for lack of a better term, of boogymen that were, hey, we're gonna be... we're opening ourselves up for litigation, you

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You can't do this, and so, luckily, I do have a legal background, and I would sort of push back and say, there's nothing in, you know, Supreme Court jurisprudence that says we can't talk about communities in this way. And so we, the Department of Energy, had developed a map

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Identifying disadvantaged communities by census tract that we were using to understand how benefits were going to flow. So we had a map. We also spent in our very first year, my first year in the agency, developing

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We spent the first year developing a framework for Justice40, and so really to understand what types of benefits needed to accrue to disadvantaged communities, those on the map, to ensure that 40% of the benefits

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of our investments would actually flow to them. And so, we had all these frameworks ready, and, you know, the sort of

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Recalcitrant or reluctant people were applauding by the end of that first year, but then when we actually had money, and then we actually did the community benefits thing, that was when they balked because that meant that it was going to be real, that the communities identified in those census tracts

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We're actually going to get benefits that we have begun to define through our work as a collective, and then also on my team. The hardest things were receiving emails at 11.30, with a markup of a document or a substantially changed document

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Without a red line

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To have to understand what wordsmithing had gone, had taken place

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didn't have to run our own document comparisons to understand where that was happening. So that was the kind of soul-crushing, undermining that, as Betty was saying, was happening in the wee hours in the morning. And these are documents that would then have to go to the White House for approval by 8am

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So, like, you can't... you can't work in those conditions, but... but those were the types of things we were confronting, and I think mainly from folks who

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Thought we were going too fast, and thought we were going too far. So I'll stop there, because, yeah, I don't want to continue to, go down the dark path, because again, there was so much goodness, and so many people who held their hands, and frankly, we could not have done it

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Without those folks who were ready for us on day one.

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That's fascinating. Thank you. Thank you so much. We're going to skip a few questions because I want us to get to some specifics in terms of moving forward and what is the legacy of the CBP framework. And if we have time

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Later during the Q&A, we can go back to some of the more specific questions.

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What would it take to move toward more standardized, measurable, enforceable frameworks, especially as states and localities pick this up

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And I would add a little bit else to this question, which is, are there any states or localities that we should be paying special attention to as potential laboratories

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for these efforts.

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So Massachusetts has passed guidance on community benefit plans and they are making they're continuing to have community benefit plans as part of the statewide efforts here in Massachusetts to address environmental injustice

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And similar to the CGEST tool, they've also released a Massachusetts Environmental Justice map that kind of makes the loop that Shalanda was pointing to there, where you identify disadvantaged communities and you're trying to

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ensure that jobs are actually going to people who live in those areas, that training programs and apprenticeship programs are supporting people who live in those places. And a lot of, in terms of

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making the system better and more enforceable, I think the states and municipalities have much more flexibility than the federal agencies in some ways to develop the data systems needed for this, because one, there was no funding

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for the data tracking piece of this in practice. And yet you're asking about where \$62 billion are going to go, and literally DOE could, at the point when I got in there, say, this is where the primary awardee is

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But not... and this is where the research is being done, but not who the subcontractors are, not where the employee ease are. So there was a real problem with the granularity of data. And then you would try and say something, well, like, let's just use Google Maps and have

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All the projects pushpins for where they've got sites are, but we can't use Google Maps because of X, Y, and Z reason. So there were all sorts of technical roadblocks to making data accessible and easy that I think states and municipalities could have more flexibility

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To build data systems that are appropriate to what we were actually trying to track with Justice 40. And I would love to see in places like Massachusetts, universities really stepping up in that role and saying, hey, we can develop an easy piece of mapping software that would let you easily register where your projects are, you know, and we can

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Because there are many, one of the biggest hurdles to the accountability and enforceability is, do you have the data to be able to create that loop? And I would love to see universities partnering with community organizations to develop citizen science

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And unions to develop proper environmental monitoring protocols for workers in the workplace and what they're taking home that can fundamentally address some of the health and safety questions around these emerging technologies. So I think it's

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Really exciting possibility. I think there's probably a lot more latitude on the state level, and I would love to see forming. I mentioned ready at the end of our work, we had built what's called the what was called the Regional Energy Democracy Initiative

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to serve Louisiana and Texas, because they had so many bipartisan infrastructure law and inflation reduction act investments that communities were literally overwhelmed by the number of projects being proposed to be developed in their areas and trying to sort them out. And so ready was a network of... and we funded and fundraised for this, a network of

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Universities, labour organisations, on the ground community groups to support communities in the building of community benefit plans. And there's absolutely no reason why we couldn't be building that structure, ready-like structure on a state by state basis

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and sharing open source data tools between communities. There really isn't a need for it to come from a federal level. So

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I would love to see that work. Sorry to speak so long, pass it back up to you, Shalanda.

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Yeah, I do want to drill down a little bit on the ready piece because you alluded to this, Sarah. Of the \$100 billion that

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We're going to flow through the agency into communities about 10 billion alone, like one in 10 of those dollars were going to flow to the Gulf South

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And this is a region that is... has been identified as impacted by industry. We have Cancer Alley, where there are higher incidences of cancer, and frankly, part of the base of the Democratic Party, where

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You know, they were the ones who believed Joe Biden when he was a candidate, and when he said, we're going to center justice, we're going to center racial equity in this moment. And so, one of the things I saw when I read through the legislation that was going to be adopted was that we were going to send more industry into those places

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And then we had this innovation called community benefits, but there was no guarantee that communities would have the capacity to

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to negotiate with industry, or even with the agency to ensure that those promises were real. And so we created Ready to create a compendium, a sort of set of resources for communities to access, but also to track

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The benefits within a region. And the ambition was huge. It was that, hey, maybe we can leverage these dollars and create a workforce training center for the region, where we're actually training young people to be a part of these industries of the future, a promise that had never been fulfilled

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Often workers are brought in to work in the petrochemical industry, and folks are not seeing those benefits. Could there be other infrastructure innovations, like water systems, you know, other types of benefits that were elevated beyond the soccer field, elevated beyond

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you know, the t-shirts and those types of things, which we know are the low-hanging fruit of quote-unquote community benefits. And so we were starting to think creatively at a regional scale, to drive development and actually say, if we are serious about industrial development.

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If what we're trying to do is transform the country so that we have the next 200 years in front of us, we have to ensure that communities have capacity to be a part of that. Otherwise, we're going to replicate the same systems and models that led us to this inequity in the first place. And so that was the ambition.

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But yeah, Betti, over to you.

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I think I love this point. I felt going into the administration that capacity in the community, that social infrastructure wasn't there to fully take advantage of the moment. There's been a lot of retrenchment, obviously, in DC

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Now is the time to be building that capacity and building that infrastructure. That's... that's what we need. We had a compendium, or a companion program to Ready called RAMP, where we were placing, like, mid-career fellows in 10 places that were getting these large and concentrated investments to try

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help organize those communities and organize coalitions and coordinate so that there would be opportunities, work in business opportunities with these projects that were receiving federal funding. These place-based capacity building efforts that, as Sarah said, they don't have to be federally funded

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But they're really, really important. Without that, it's always going to be the people driving the project getting the funding

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even if we say engage with community, who's supporting the community to do the engagement? Who's supporting the community to figure out what their priorities are, and how to... and how to wrestle amongst themselves to figure out

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you know, to build that power to engage effectively in these community benefits negotiations. So the capacity building is essential. I think another piece of that is the frameworks like what makes a good community benefits agreement, and that's different in different places, and it's different for different

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projects, but figuring out, you know, the 80-85% that's shared is important. Figuring out things like the governance structure for how to ensure accountability over the long term. So all of these things, to me, fall in the bucket of capacity building

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But there's two other ways to answer the question. Sarah talked about a registry. I think that falls under this idea of accountability, transparency. We pushed really hard internally just for transparency, just to publish publicly what

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Firms had committed to in their applications. That's just a matter of ensuring against fraud. But that was really, really hard, and we didn't fully succeed. We got summaries of many of the community benefits plans. LPO

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published all of theirs, which was well received. But there might have been organizations named in applications that didn't even know they were named. How do you ensure that that engagement is happening? Transparency

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Both for what was committed to, and then, as Sarah said, for what the results are happening, like, what is happening over time, a way to track that data and daylight it and improve upon it, or improve the program structure based on the feedback that you're getting from the data

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And then the last thing is congressional intent. Like we were limited by our discretionary authority as funders. It's funding agencies, which meant that

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Our legal framework was tied to project risk mitigation. and that was that was what we had to work with. And and we did, and I happen to believe that community benefits engagement. This stuff is is really important to reducing execution risk

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But if Congress had said to DOE, you also have to consider the economic impacts, the distributional effects, the equity and justice effects of these projects, the quality of the jobs, the opportunities to access those jobs

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Then we would have been able to do a lot more. We would have been able to not just have this incentive structure with how we scored and awarded projects, project proposals, but also some requirements in some case we could have been more prescriptive in the ways that

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that matter. And so I know that the time is not now to advance that, but thinking about how to direct agencies

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more explicitly would have helped a lot.

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Thank you. Thank you so much. Now, the last question before we go to the Q&A

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Would be if you have some final thoughts on what a future administration could do differently regarding CBPs or regarding those policy goals CBPs were meant to achieve if you think that perhaps a different mechanism, a different tool

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would be more appropriate.

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Don't know if we will be able to solve this problem in 3 minutes or 5 minutes before the Q&A, but

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I would like you to try.

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I'm really curious to hear what what Sarah and Shalanda have to say about this. For me, you know, working on labor

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and job quality and access to good quality jobs, we have some statutory levers to lean on. Not a lot, not enough. Davis-Bacon sets a wage standard for construction jobs and through executive order

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President Biden increased the minimum to \$15 an hour that has since been repealed. And so some workers working on federally funded projects are paid

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Half that in some places. In any case, there are some longstanding laws to support job quality and federally funded construction projects, not in manufacturing or industry

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or anything else. But that helps. There's

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getting more sweeping labor law reform that really protects workers' rights to organize

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would be game changing. I already said what you know the thing about congressional intent, intent and direction to agencies around some of the goals that we were trying to achieve, which would have unlocked more opportunity

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But also funding for that capacity building to try to sort of balance the bargaining power of communities and project developers. We piloted, and as Sar said, raised money internally for some really creative endeavors there

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That I think we're poised for real transformative success. My hope in doing those pilots was to demonstrate what was possible with federal funding in a way that could be built upon at scale under future Congresses or administrations. So I think there's still

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A lot of good thinking that could be built upon the other part of it is we didn't really get to the point of the data reporting. A lot of really good frameworks

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were developed mostly by Sarah and others. And getting to be able to put the data out on what

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we're accomplishing creates this feedback loop where that then influence influences that iterative design of programs to make sure that we're continually doing better.

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Those are tweaks. Yeah, I'd love to hear from the other folks about overhauls.

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I mean, there's so much in the way our agencies are built that thwart the kind of

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heterogeneous systems that we need to develop for sustainability right now. And there really is such profound siloing between the agencies within the agencies themselves and so much protection of your own turf because the

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offices kind of have a sort of

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I don't know, they sort of compete with each other in this weird way. So I think there really needs to be more thinking about how these can be effectively woven together, and woven together in a much

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A really transformed way of thinking about the role that the government can play in community in the sense that we have the technology now for much faster feedback systems for people to be reporting on DOE programs, for

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data to be just shared continuously from monitoring systems and have people who watch those sites for alerts and response. So there needs to be a stepping back and really thinking about how can we leverage

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The possibilities we have right now for community engagement into real accountability systems that recognize that we live amidst the energy systems that sustain us. And we are we are poised to report on our job conditions and

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let you know if there's a natural gas leak or we need to develop a really embedded sense of what our public funding is

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producing in our day-to-day lives. And so, I guess I would love to see it woven more tightly to schools and libraries and our other civic

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systems as a place to go and learn about the energy project near you, the DOE project near you, to get involved in sharing data that you encounter in your everyday life.

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And in a much more ambitious way, think about funding people for that. I hope we talk more about data centers in the Q&A. But we need to start thinking about ourselves as data laborers, you know, who are providing data

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into a system and really think about doing micropayments for people's data, knowing where your data goes, being responsible carriers for the data systems and energy systems that we depend on. So I mean, I think there's a long way to go and

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a lot of possibility that we will probably not make good on. Go ahead, Shalanda.

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All of it, right? All of the above. And I'll highlight two additional pieces. So

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I want to underscore the legislation piece. We were in... we were running around in a box that was this big to try to make something that had never been made before. We need legislation that allows for the capacity building to happen. So, we were scraping off technical assistance money

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like, kind of covering her eyes to say, I hope this flies. Like, if there's any sort of review. But we need, we need resources authorized by Congress to train the workers of the future, to train the diverse businesses and underrepresented businesses to participate in the clean energy economy

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We were making that up. We had no resources to actually do that. So the sort of logics underlying the bipartisan infrastructure law and Inflation Reduction Act were that we could suddenly turn on a switch, and that all these businesses and all these workers would suddenly be there

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And they weren't, because we had been draining these communities of resources for 200 years. And so there was nothing there from which we could pull, right, to create this new diverse, just, and equitable clean energy system. So we

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legislation that allows for us to spend money on the capacity building and on the pipeline. The second thing is unpopular, but we haven't talked about the White House

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They could have moved much faster in terms of the justice and equity work. You know, there was a lot of work done in the first 100 days around energy communities. A lot of that was politically driven, but there were funding programs that were stood up within 100 days

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Targeting, certain communities that had legacy energy issues, sort of coal communities that had been... that were, you know, transitioning away from coal for good reason, needing those resources.

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So there's nothing wrong with that. But on the other side of the ledger were these millions of people who believed in the promise that was made on the campaign trail and were saying, what is in it for us

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The White House never developed a comprehensive framework for Justice40.

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We did

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We did.

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And because we were standing alone as an agency, it made it very difficult for us to convince our colleagues that we were on the right path.

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But if the White House had provided cover in the first 100 days and said, every agency is in it for themselves, or here's our framework, we would have had more ability to run faster. And I think the debates we were having with the cynics inside the agency would have been squashed because they were raising concerns

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And they were saying, well, there's no White House guidance on this. But it didn't matter because we had it at the agency. So we needed that cover and we needed the courageous leadership that frankly never came.

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Thank you so, so much for your honesty and your wealth of knowledge and willingness to share it. We will now move on and begin our Q&A

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We have a lot of questions in the chat. I don't know if we'll be able to go through all of them. We also have some beautiful, really beautiful notes from people who have either interacted and engaged directly with DOE and with some of you

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really grateful for your work in the communities themselves. We have a lovely note from Kate Gordon, just saying what an honor it was to work with all three of you at DOE.

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So we'll start with the first question. How and when did DOE figure out that it needed to define what a community was?

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And realized the differences between communities across the US and the need to connect in person with those communities that you were able to that you were supposed to better understand to effectively collaborate.

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I'll move really fast here. So the Justice40 Initiative designed or laid out in executive Order 14008

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said almost verbatim that the administration is making the commitment that 40% of the benefits of our investments in climate and clean energy were going to go to disadvantaged communities. And so we knew right away, after reading the

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The executive order that we needed to understand what disadvantaged communities were. And so that was one of the first projects I set out to do, and I was able to stand up a team made up of folks from the national labs

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to look at data sets on disadvantage, and we pulled together a map really quickly over the course of around 4 months, which pulled together 36 different data sets and indicators that we essentially stacked and

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As a result of that, we were able to have a heat map of where there was deeper disadvantage and around 18% of the census tracts in the country, based on our map were identified as such. There's a lot more detail there, but that was the key. Having that

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And then pressure testing it and saying, does this make sense? Are there communities that are left out? Because census tract level data isn't that great. But it was the best granularity we had to be able to move forward. The second thing is, the question about how do we know we had to be on the ground

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So, our office led the Energy Justice to the People Roadshow, which Sonrisa Lucero spearheaded, who's not in the space in our Zoom, but I want to just acknowledge them.

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But we knew that the communities that were going to be the most impacted, whether they be in the Gulf South or in the sort of post-industrial communities in the Midwest or in the Northeast,

needed to see us, and we needed to take our colleagues to those places so they understood the material lived conditions of those places

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who were facing 100 years of cumulative impacts. And so it was a little bit risky, but we pulled together delegations of dozens of colleagues, including the Secretary of Energy, to spend a lot of time in community, and we spent a lot of time in the Gulf South, in sort of Cancer Alley

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region, right outside of New Orleans, and it was a way for us to build an accountability loop where communities were seeing us, and then we were also seeing them. And so that was the logic behind that, and I think it was successful, because as soon as we got back to DC

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Folks who say, well, how do we help? So, they understood it in a more, kind of embodied way versus this sort of theoretical way, me or Sarah in the room arguing with them about the needs for benefits to those places.

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I just want to add on that the importance of the place-based experience. Not enough federal employees

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have on-the-ground experience. That sounds weird to say, but a lot of people, they're very good in the policy arena

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Sort of at the ivory tower level. They haven't been... they don't come from these communities, they haven't spent time in these communities. Sometimes I wondered if a lot of my colleagues even knew a working-class person personally

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I think, like, recruiting a more diverse

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a cohort for the next backfilling career positions, and also political positions

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is really important, and you're bringing some of that awareness into the agency. I think the thing, and I learned from Shalanda doing this, of getting our colleagues to see for themselves is infinitely more effective

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been lecturing them. I found that the more that we could get our colleagues in front of people that were really facing challenges, either with legacy pollution or crappy jobs

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or employers who discount their needs. The more effectively they kind of supported the agenda.

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Nothing to add to that, just in the interest of time, absolutely, those were our most effective engagements when we brought the people out of DC into communities and they were very challenging too, very deeply emotional experiences.

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Thanks. We have another good question here. Knowing that some of the projects are either starting back

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or going forward without federal funding, I am curious if you all think that some of the projects companies and efforts will stay committed to their intents around these plans.

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If I can just jump in here. This is one of my biggest concerns right now is the ways in which the CBP effort may have unintentionally paved the way for some of these projects to go ahead. I'm particularly concerned about the direct air capture

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hubs, the one in Sulfur, Louisiana, in particular was very contentious when we were down there discussing community benefit plans, and the community needs are so profound. They've had, you know, hurricane after hurricane, people are asking for very reasonable things like resilience hubs and

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emergency alert systems that actually work, which is really important when you actually have to evacuate regularly from chemical spills or explosions, and hurricanes. So

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Those projects I was looking at their sites right now, some of them at a PR level, some of the things still seem to be existing, like paid community advisory boards, which is great as long as it is actually staffed with people from the community

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That it's not actually a way of performing community consent. You know, it's the absence of an accountability system that really checks, like, well, who is on this community advisory board really needs to be followed up. Same thing for the hydrogen hub projects, which are continuing, and predictably the ones that

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are continuing the natural gas laden projects and the carbon safe program is still basically untouched. That's our carbon storage program. And there's a huge amount of community concern about carbon storage and its safety

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And so I would, I think harvesting the community benefits plans now, looking at what they proposed they could do, at least it shows what people were willing to do to get the federal money.

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I'll pass it on to Betany and Shalonda.

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Just to, I would take it a step further. Paid community advisory boards where the individuals are selected by and paid by the company are very dangerous. Like they are not, that is not good practice

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And there is huge red flags when you see that. People should be paid for their time, but

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But those advisory boards, if they exist, should absolutely represent the interests of the community and not be captured by what the company wants to move forward. I to go back to the original question, I have spent a lot of time interviewing a lot of these

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entities that received federal funding and asking about their experience generally, but also about the community benefits plan process and

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Most... all most if not all of the firms I talked to said that if their project wasn't canceled, they're continuing to implement their community benefits plan, that it was baked in to their project. They see it as important to the success of their project

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And they are not, you know, talking about it and they don't want to be on the record. They don't want to draw any attention from the Trump administration. But they see it as they see those things as helpful to their project. I will say

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That I think people, these firms particularly saw value in the workforce elements of that, like they saw a return to their project from earlier workforce engagement. And I saw less entrenched commitments

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Around the justice and equity pieces. And that is reflected where I saw I tracked the all of the awards that we made over \$50 million

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74% of them had commitments to or existing

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agreements, enforceable, legally enforceable negotiated agreements, but 68% of that was labor agreements. And so and the bigger projects were more likely to have labor agreements. The community benefits agreements commitments tended to be on smaller projects, which is the

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opposite of what we would want to see. So

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it's... there's some positive things. There's a lot of work to do. I think the things that were easy for firms to walk away from, they did the ways in which they saw that it really helped advance their interests, those things stuck

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Betty, I just want to check the time. It's right at the hour. Do we have a few more minutes

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Yeah

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Yes, we are at the hour, so if you want to give us one parting thought that would be great, and then we will wrap it.

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Okay, great. You know, I won't go back to any of the comments that were made by Sarah and Betany, but I will say just for those who are in the audience.

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We have to disrupt these logics of development.

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The whole premise of the community benefit framework was that these are taxpayer dollars

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There's no guarantee, there's no sort of, it's not a gift to industry. And so because their taxpayer dollars, the benefits must accrue

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To communities, to the tax base. And so

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Even though it seems so mind-blowing, and we did get a lot of, like, quizzical looks from industry when we put this out in the world

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It logically follows that when you're getting a dollar that is earned by an American taxpayer, you have to show your receipts

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And so, that is the floor. Let's just say that.

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It's not the end of the story. And so, yeah, I hope we do get another bite at the apple. We have a lot of work to do in this space, so thanks for hosting us today, and I'll turn it over to others

01:02:20.000 --> 01:02:25.000
You said it all. That's a good note to end on. I have nothing to add.

01:02:25.000 --> 01:02:41.000

That is an excellent parting thought. Well, I want to thank our speakers and thank you folks who joined us today. Please expect a follow-up email from us in the coming days with relevant link and the recording to this webinar

01:02:41.000 --> 01:02:48.000

And thank you all so much.

TRANSCRIPT ENDS