

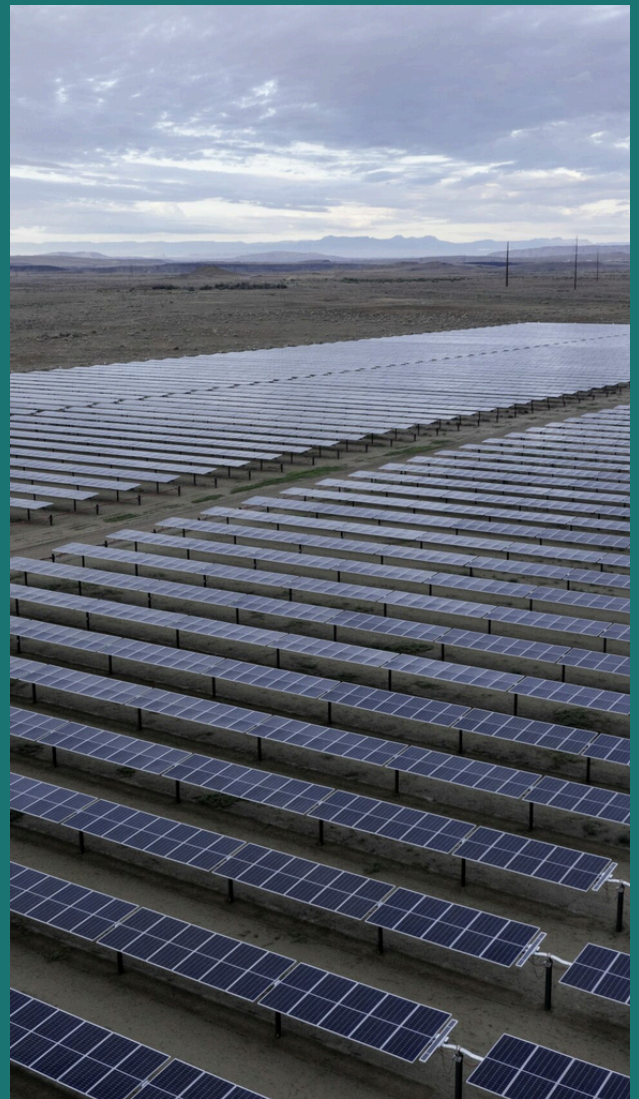


SAN JUAN
CITIZENS
ALLIANCE

Centering Community in the Energy Transition:

Public Opinion from
the Four Corners
Region

January 2026



Prepared by



single space strategies

media, data, and strategic consulting...in one single space

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Executive Summary

Residents across the Four Corners region are actively engaged with questions about energy transition, but their support depends less on specific technologies and more on how change is pursued, who is involved, and whether communities see tangible benefits. This survey of nearly 400 residents across Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah provides insight into how people understand environmental change, energy development, and what a clean and just transition should look like in practice.

Key takeaways

Environmental concern is high and grounded in lived experience.

Residents expressed strong concern about environmental issues that directly affect daily life, including water scarcity, drought, extreme heat, wildfires, and access to clean air and drinking water. While concern about climate change is widespread, responses were strongest when framed around local, tangible impacts rather than abstract or politicized language.

Economic stability shapes views of energy transition.

Most residents do not support an immediate or complete phase-out of fossil fuels. Instead, a majority favor a mixed energy future that balances renewables with existing energy sources. When considering a transition away from coal, residents are most concerned about impacts on local businesses, jobs, public services, and long-term community stability. At the same time, residents strongly support outcomes such as cleaner land and water, ecosystem restoration, and the creation of new, good-paying jobs, indicating that communities are weighing risks and opportunities simultaneously.

Communities want early, meaningful engagement rooted in trust

Residents consistently emphasized the importance of being engaged early in the planning process, before decisions are finalized. Trust is strongest in local messengers, including community leaders, tribal leaders and governments, and local media. Residents prefer engagement formats that allow for dialogue and participation, such as town halls, surveys, site tours, and participation in existing local events, and stressed the importance of language access and clear communication.

Accountability and stewardship matter.

When energy projects end, residents expect corporations to bear primary responsibility for site cleanup, either independently or in partnership with government. When siting new transmission infrastructure, residents prioritize avoiding environmental and cultural impacts, consulting nearby communities, and repurposing existing infrastructure where possible. These expectations reflect a broader desire for long-term stewardship and shared responsibility.

There is broad alignment on values, even where definitions vary.

Across demographic and political groups, residents strongly agree that a successful energy transition should protect the environment, support local economies, include clear planning, and incorporate many voices. While perceptions of specific energy technologies vary and are often complex, there is shared support for community-centered, inclusive approaches and for recognizing Indigenous knowledge as part of a fair transition.

Implications for engagement and funding

Taken together, these findings show that Four Corners residents are not resistant to change, but are attentive to process, equity, and outcomes. For nonprofits, funders, and others working to support a clean and just energy transition, the data point toward the importance of early engagement, trusted local partnerships, economic clarity, and accountability. Efforts that center community priorities, acknowledge complexity, and invest in long-term relationships are most likely to build trust and support durable, community-driven outcomes.



Introduction & Methodology

Introduction

San Juan Citizens Alliance (SJCA) has taken an active role in developing the Four Corners Community Energy Plan, with deep commitments to community engagement, economic justice, and a just transition to clean energy.

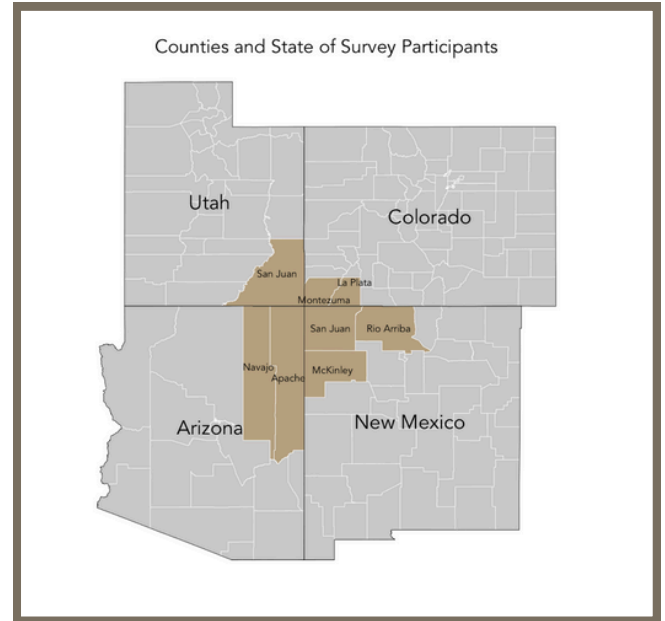
This report summarizes the findings of a survey with almost 400 Four Corners region residents, residing in eight counties and four states with an oversample of New Mexico residents. This survey seeks to understand public opinion on clean energy development, economic transition strategies, and local energy priorities through targeted public opinion polling.

Methodology

We fielded a mixed-method online and live telephone interviewer survey from November through December, 2025 across the Four Corners Area. As shown on the map, the geographic scope of this study included eight counties in Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah, with the primary group of interest being residents of the New Mexican counties. The counties include the following in each of the four states:

- Arizona:
 - Apache
 - Navajo
- Colorado:
 - La Plata
 - Montezuma
- New Mexico:
 - McKinley
 - Rio Arriba
 - San Juan
- Utah:
 - San Juan

In total, the survey yielded 391 responses across the Four Corners area, including 69 in Arizona, 30 in Colorado, 283 in New Mexico, and 9 in Utah.

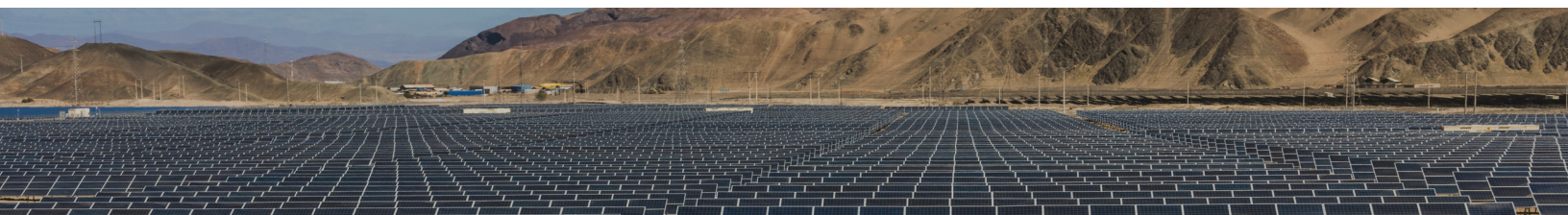


The survey included questions on the following:

- Assessments of environmental concerns in their communities
- Knowledge of, and community involvement and engagement on energy projects
- Questions on energy transitions including:
 - What an energy future should look like
 - Concerns and priorities of an energy transition
- Concerns, priorities, and responsibilities of building out transmission infrastructure
- Trusted and most relied upon information sources

The survey data was weighted to ensure different groups were represented appropriately according to their share within the county in which they reside.

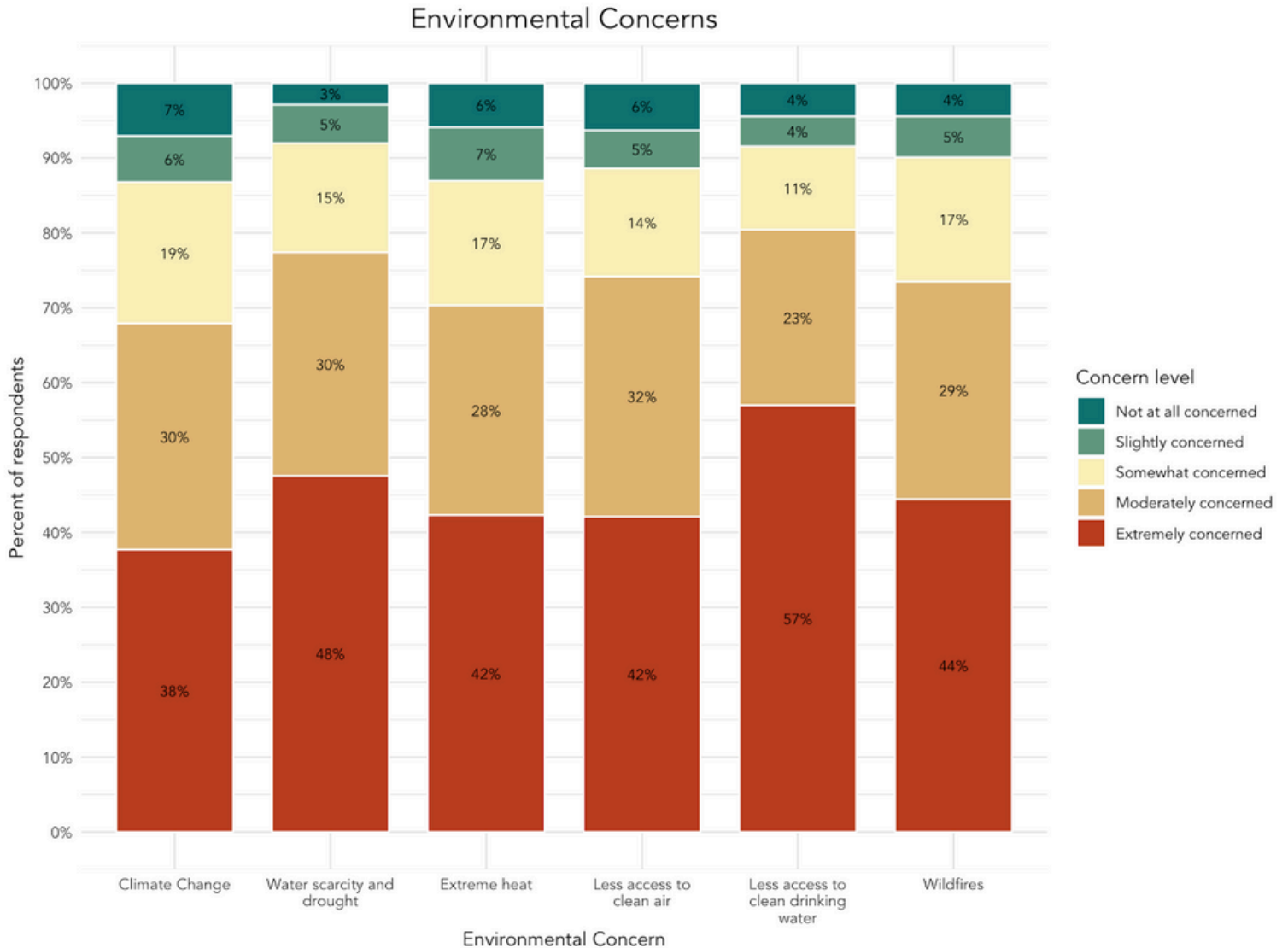
See Appendix A for a breakdown of the demographics of survey respondents.



Findings

Environmental concerns in communities

Concerns of environmental changes and potential hazards offer an important baseline on community sentiment of the direction that energy production and consumption needs to take.



Overall, it is clear that most residents of the Four Corners region are extremely or moderately concerned about the many environmental impacts that climate change can have – between 7 to 8 out of 10 respondents were worried about water scarcity and drought, extreme heat, less access to both clean air and drinking water, and wildfires in their communities. Importantly, while the majority of residents were concerned about climate change as well, the survey showed that more tangible potential outcomes of climate change (such as wildfires) caused higher levels of concern.

This has important implications for messaging when considering shifting to renewable energy sources. Four Corners residents may respond more favorably to and assess concerns as more urgent when projects are proposed that address more tangible concerns, rather than a potentially more politically-charged concept like climate change. However, as noted, this difference is marginal. What is most important to note is that overall, Four Corners Area residents are very concerned about adverse impacts of climate change.

Across environmental concerns, women, Hispanic respondents, and Democrats were more likely than other respondents to be extremely or moderately concerned. Respondents with a graduate degree and those who have lived in the Four Corners area for more than 10 years were more likely to express concern about climate change than other respondents, suggesting that both education and long-term exposure to regional environmental conditions shape perceptions of risk.

Native respondents disproportionately expressed concern about access to clean drinking water, highlighting the central role of water security as an environmental and public health issue in the region.

Interestingly, respondents who identify as political moderates were more likely than others to express concern about water scarcity, indicating that water availability may serve as a broadly shared concern across ideological lines.

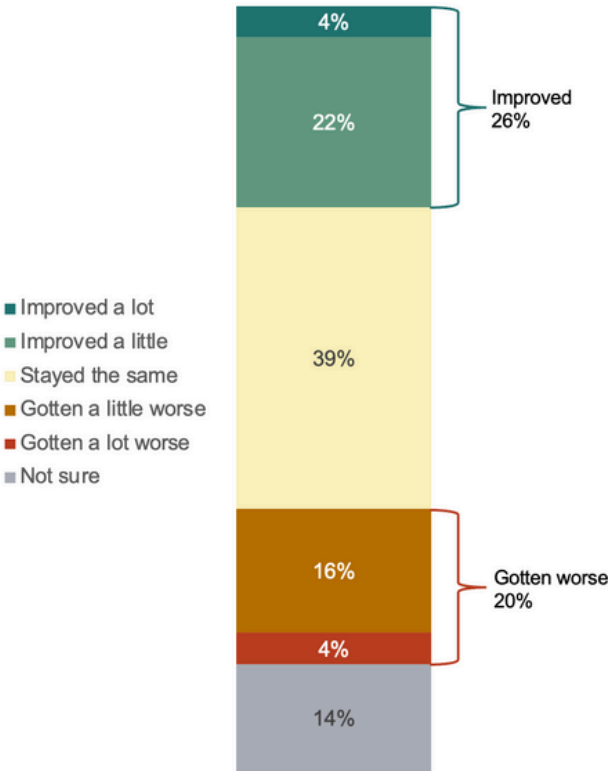
While White respondents and Republicans were least likely to express concern across all measures, concern about environmental impacts remained present across all groups, pointing to an opportunity to engage diverse audiences by emphasizing tangible, community-level impacts.

Spotlight on New Mexico

In particular, New Mexican respondents reported more concern about climate change than residents in other states (70% versus 62% extremely or moderately concerned) and slightly more concern about water scarcity and drought (78% to 75%), extreme heat (71% to 68%), and access to clean drinking water (81% to 78%). New Mexican residents were slightly less likely to express extreme or moderate concern about wildfires (71% to 79%). 74% of respondents across the Four Corners area, including New Mexican respondents, expressed extreme or moderate concern about access to clean air, underscoring the regional nature of this environmental impact.



Perceived Change in Air Quality in Four Corners in Last Two Years



Regional Air Quality Improvement

To assess perceptions of the environment in the Four Corners, residents were asked whether the air quality in the region has improved, stayed the same, or gotten worse over the last two years. Nearly forty percent of residents report that the air quality has stayed the same. Twenty-eight percent say it has improved, while 20% say it has gotten worse.

Native American residents, those with higher levels of education, respondents with ties to the energy industry, those who have lived in the Four Corners for a long time, and Democrats are most likely to say air quality has improved. Men and Hispanic residents are most likely to report air quality has gotten worse. Older residents and those with lower levels of education were most likely to respond that they are unsure.

There were no significant differences across states in terms of perception of changes in air quality.

Community involvement and engagement on energy projects

Awareness of energy projects and energy transition concepts

First, to assess Four Corners residents’ awareness of projects and concepts related to energy and transition, the survey asked whether people had heard, read, or seen anything related to coal energy production, solar energy projects, and hydrogen pipeline projects in the Four Corners region in the past 12 months. Additionally, participants were asked whether they had heard anything about the Navajo Transitional Energy Company (NTEC) and the concept of a just energy transition and where they had heard about these things.

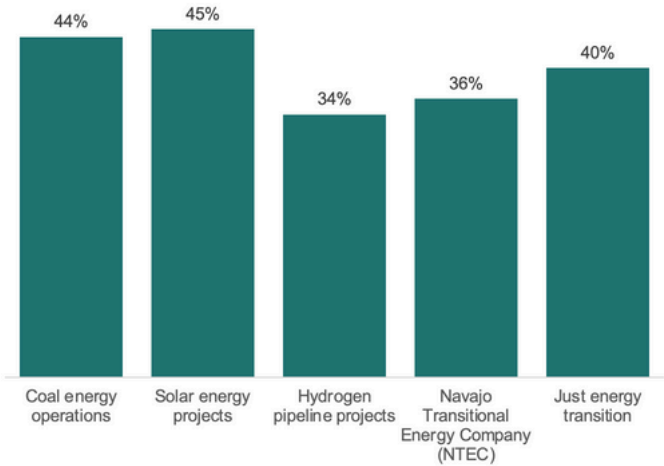
Generally, fewer than half of residents have heard, read, or seen anything about energy operations, energy projects, NTEC, or a just transition in the last twelve months. The largest proportion of residents have heard of solar (45%) and coal (44%) energy projects. Fewer residents (34%) have heard anything about hydrogen pipeline projects and NTEC (36%).

Unsurprisingly, respondents who work in the energy industry or have family members or close friends who work in the industry are more likely to have seen or heard something about these energy projects.

Respondents with higher levels of education were more likely to report having heard or read about energy and pipeline projects than respondents with lower levels of education, suggesting differences in access to or exposure to information rather than differences in underlying interest. Democrats were also more likely to report awareness of these projects overall. Interestingly, Republicans were more likely than Independents to have heard about solar energy projects, indicating that familiarity with renewable energy is not limited to any single political group. Together, these findings highlight the need for diverse and accessible communication strategies to ensure that information about energy projects reaches residents across educational and political lines.

More than a third of residents reported having heard or seen something about the Navajo Transitional Energy Company (NTEC) (36%). Native respondents were much more likely to respond affirmatively (52%) as were respondents with higher levels of education and younger respondents.

Awareness of Energy Projects and Energy Transition Concepts in the Four Corners Region



Four in ten Four Corners residents have heard of the concept of a just energy transition, defined in the survey as efforts to move away from fossil fuels in a way that supports workers and communities from those industries. Respondents with higher levels of education, Democrats, political liberals, and those with ties to the energy industry were more likely to report having heard of the concept of just transition than other respondents. Again, these findings underscore the opportunity to expand the reach of current engagement efforts to other communities.

Spotlight on New Mexico

New Mexico residents were more likely than others to have heard something about coal projects, hydrogen pipeline projects, and NTEC. Almost one in five New Mexico residents said they weren't sure if they had heard of the concept of a just energy transition compared to only 8% of respondents from other Four Corners states.



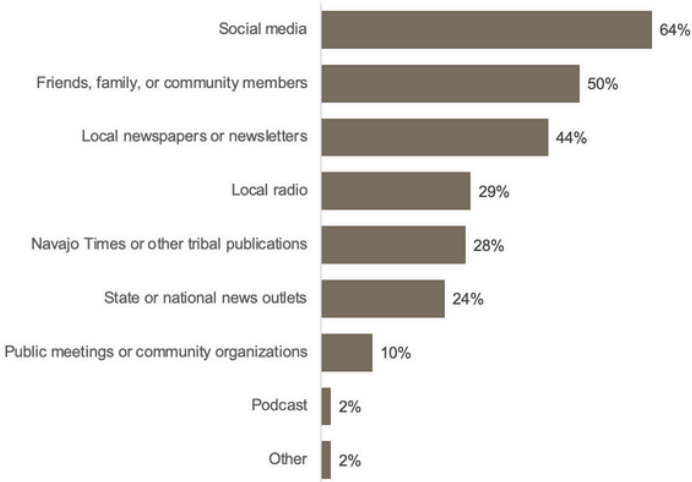
Where residents learn about energy projects and initiatives

Respondents who reported hearing or reading about energy projects, NTEC, or a just energy transition were asked where they heard or read about them. A majority of residents (64%) reported receiving this information from social media, and half (50%) from friends, family, or community members, indicating that information about energy in the Four Corners most often circulates through informal, relationship-based channels. Less than half of residents received information from more traditional media sources such as local newspapers (44%), radio (29%), tribal publications (28%), or state or national news outlets (24%), suggesting that these outlets remain important but relatively fewer knowledgeable residents.

Only one in ten respondents received information from public meetings or community organizations, which likely reflects barriers to access or awareness rather than lack of interest, given strong stated preferences elsewhere in the survey for in-person engagement opportunities.

There were notable differences across demographic groups. Younger residents were more likely to report learning about energy topics through social media (81%) and personal networks (68%), while older respondents more frequently cited local newspapers (60%). Native residents were most likely to mention local newspapers (52%), radio (38%), and tribal publications (48%), highlighting the continued importance of trusted, culturally specific information sources.

Where have you heard or read about these topics?



Respondents with a graduate degree were more than three times as likely as others to receive information through public meetings (32%), suggesting that formal engagement channels may be more accessible to residents with higher levels of education.

Spotlight on New Mexico

New Mexico residents were more likely than residents of other states to get information on these topics from social media and local radio and less likely to get information from friends, family and community members.

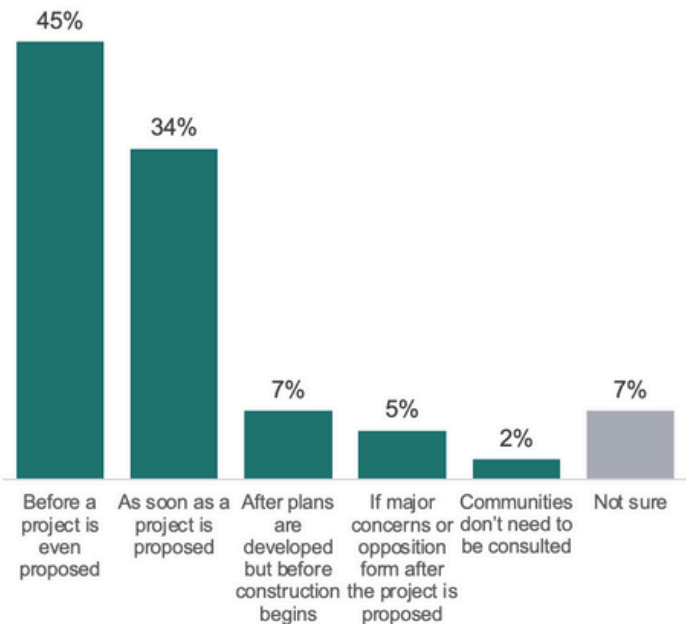


When and how to engage community members in energy projects

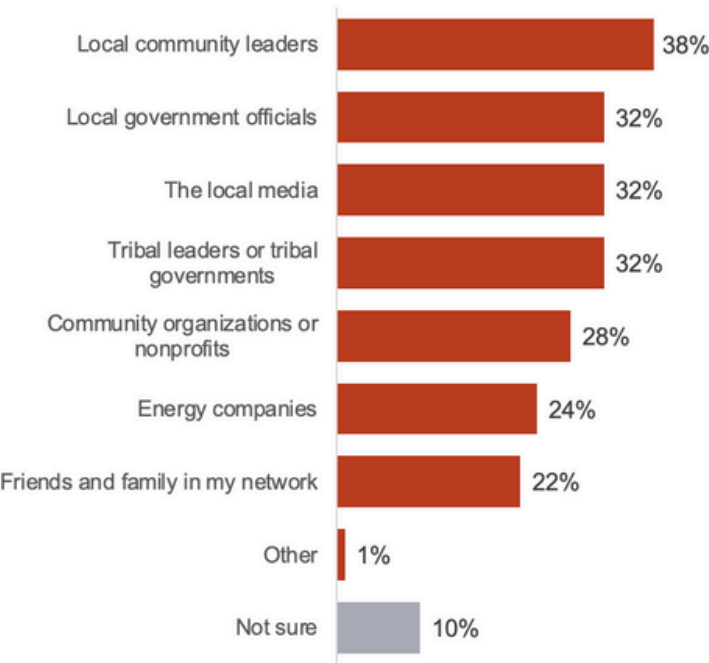
When we asked residents at what stage of a new project they wanted to be engaged, the data shows that early engagement is preferred. Almost half of survey respondents (45%) wanted community involvement to occur before projects are even proposed. Slightly more than a third (34%) thought community involvement should begin as soon as the project is proposed, meaning that most (79%) believe communities should be involved in energy projects either before or immediately after a new project proposal.

Only 2% of residents do not feel that communities need to be consulted on new energy projects at all. Residents with lower levels of education are more likely to say that communities only need to be consulted if major concerns come up or not at all.

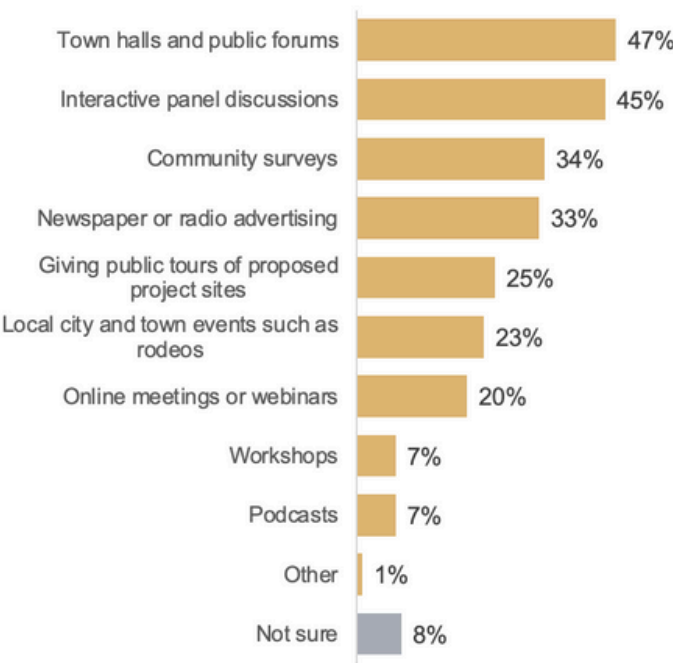
When do you think local communities should be consulted about new energy projects, if at all?



Who do you trust the most to provide information about new energy projects in your community?



What is the best way for energy companies to engage with local communities when planning new energy projects?



During the process of proposing a new energy project, it is also important to share information and to ensure that the source of information is trusted, as trusted messengers play a critical role in whether early engagement is perceived as meaningful. When residents were asked who they trust most to provide information about new energy projects in their communities, the largest proportion (38%) selected local community leaders, indicating that trust is grounded primarily in local, relationship-based actors. Nearly a third of residents (32%) reported trusting local government officials, the local media, and tribal leaders or tribal governments, suggesting that multiple locally rooted institutions serve as important information conduits.

Fewer respondents reported trusting community organizations or energy companies themselves to provide this information, underscoring the importance of using trusted intermediaries rather than relying solely on company-led communication. Nearly a quarter of respondents (22%) indicated that they trust information from their personal networks, and one in ten residents reported uncertainty about who to trust, highlighting the need for clear, transparent, and accessible communication early in the project process.

There were notable differences across demographic groups. Native respondents were significantly more likely to trust tribal leaders or tribal governments (54%), while Hispanic (47%) and White (40%) respondents were more likely to trust local media. Respondents with higher levels of education (59%) were substantially more likely to trust community organizations and nonprofits as information sources. Together, these patterns suggest that effective engagement strategies must rely on multiple, culturally relevant messengers to ensure information reaches and resonates with diverse community members.

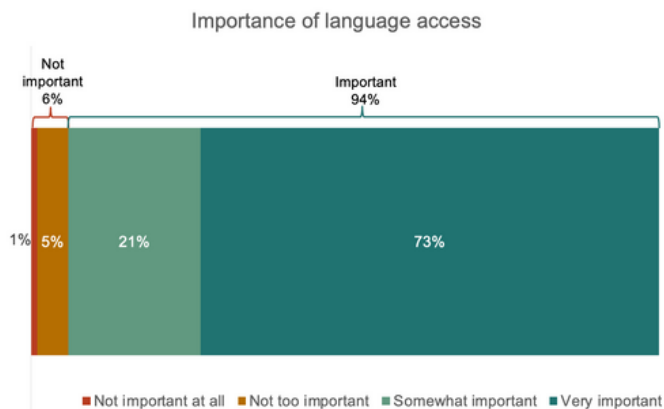
When asked about the best ways for energy companies to engage local communities when planning new projects, respondents most often emphasized interactive formats that allow for dialogue and participation. Town halls and public forums (47%) and interactive panel discussions (45%) were the most frequently cited engagement methods.

Around a third of respondents suggested community surveys (34%) and newspaper or radio advertising (33%), while a quarter expressed interest in public tours of proposed project sites. Nearly one quarter preferred engagement through local events, and one in five indicated interest in online meetings or webinars. A smaller share of respondents (7%) mentioned workshops and podcasts.

Significant differences across demographic groups point to the importance of offering multiple engagement options. Over half of White respondents (52%) preferred engagement through town halls and public forums, and respondents with higher levels of education also disproportionately selected this format. Native respondents were more likely to prefer community surveys (42%), while younger respondents expressed greater interest in experiential engagement methods, including public tours of proposed sites (37%) and local city or town events such as rodeos (33%). Together, these findings suggest that effective community engagement requires a mix of interactive, place-based, and culturally responsive approaches rather than reliance on a single engagement strategy.

Importance of language access

When sharing project information, community members further emphasized the importance of ensuring that project information is accessible to every community member regardless of what language they read or speak. In fact, almost three-quarters of survey respondents (73%) found this to be very important, and 21% thought this was somewhat important, meaning that 94% total thought that language access would be critical to ensure that project information is understood by everyone within the community.



Spotlight on New Mexico

New Mexico residents were more likely than residents of other states to trust information from their local media and community organizations or nonprofits. New Mexicans were also less likely to trust information coming directly from energy companies. In terms of methods of engagement, respondents from New Mexico expressed less interest in town halls and panel discussions than other respondents and had a slightly higher rate of preference for online meetings/webinars and site tours.



What Community Benefit Agreements should prioritize

When considering new energy projects, it is important that Community Benefit Agreements (CBAs) are structured to ensure that communities affected by development meaningfully benefit from project outcomes. While we recommend that each community conduct its own assessment to identify specific needs and priorities, our survey asked Four Corners residents what they would generally like to see included in a CBA.

More than half of respondents (52%) indicated that CBAs should prioritize hiring local residents, and nearly half (49%) emphasized investing directly in community services and infrastructure. Slightly fewer respondents (43%) supported including land restoration, and the smallest share (37%) identified training and apprenticeship programs as a priority. Taken together, these findings suggest that residents place a high value on benefits that provide immediate and tangible economic returns, while still recognizing the importance of longer-term environmental and workforce investments.

There were also notable differences across racial groups. White respondents were more likely to prioritize local hiring, while Native respondents were more likely to emphasize training and apprenticeship opportunities. These differences likely reflect varying community experiences, economic conditions, and long-term workforce goals, underscoring the importance of designing CBAs that are responsive to local context and balance near-term economic stability with sustained community investment.

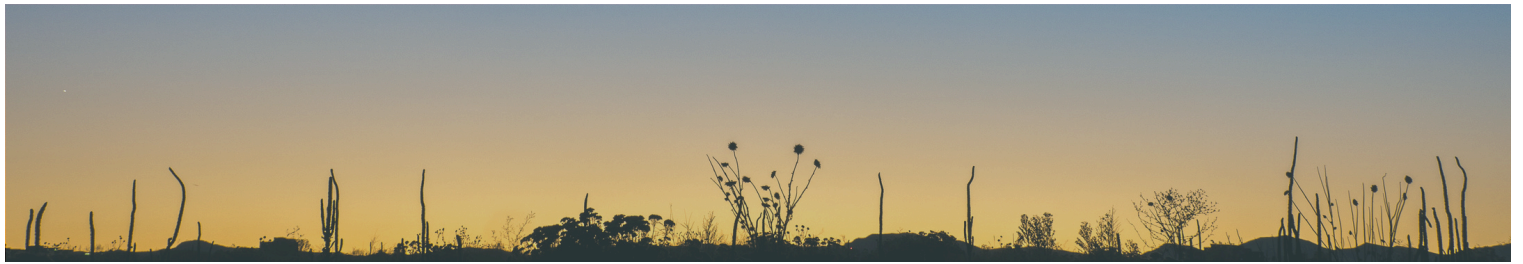
Most important community benefits to include in Community Benefit Agreements



**Respondents were invited to choose up to two benefits*

Spotlight on New Mexico

New Mexico residents were more likely than residents in other Four Corners states to prioritize training and apprenticeship benefits over land and environmental restoration or investments in community programs and infrastructure, reflecting a strong emphasis on workforce development as communities navigate economic transition.



Attitudes and perspectives on the energy transition

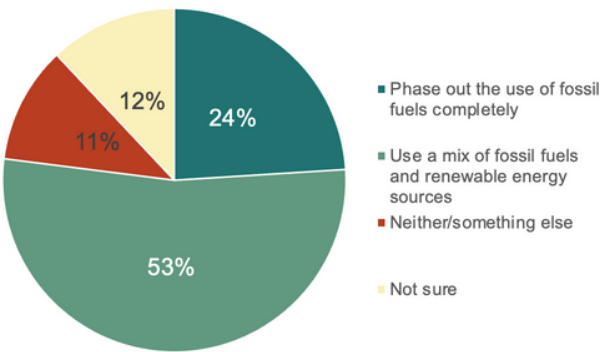
What the energy future and transition should look like

To understand how Four Corners residents view the future of energy production and a potential transition away from coal, the survey asked about preferred energy pathways, concerns about community impacts, and the positive changes residents hope to see. Together, these questions offer insight into how communities are weighing economic, environmental, and social considerations as they think about the region’s energy future.

Only a quarter (24%) of residents indicated that they want their state to phase out fossil fuels completely. A majority (53%) preferred an energy future that includes a mix of fossil fuels and renewable energy sources. Nearly a quarter of respondents (23%) either were unsure (12%) or expressed a different view (11%) about how their state should produce energy in the future, suggesting that a substantial share of residents do not see existing options as fully capturing their preferences.

As expected, Democrats (28%) were more likely than Republicans (19%) to support a complete phase-out of fossil fuels. Independents expressed similar levels of support for a phase-out to Democrats (28%), but were more likely than other groups to report uncertainty (15%), indicating less fixed views about their state’s long-term energy pathway.

When it comes to producing energy in the future, do you think your state’s government should:



Spotlight on New Mexico

Respondents from New Mexico expressed distinct views on the future of energy production compared to residents of other Four Corners states. Over a quarter of New Mexicans (27%) supported phasing out fossil fuels, compared with 15% of respondents from other states. New Mexico residents were also less likely to favor a mixed energy future, with 48% preferring a combination of fossil fuels and renewables compared to 66% of respondents elsewhere, suggesting a stronger openness to change in New Mexico than in the broader region.

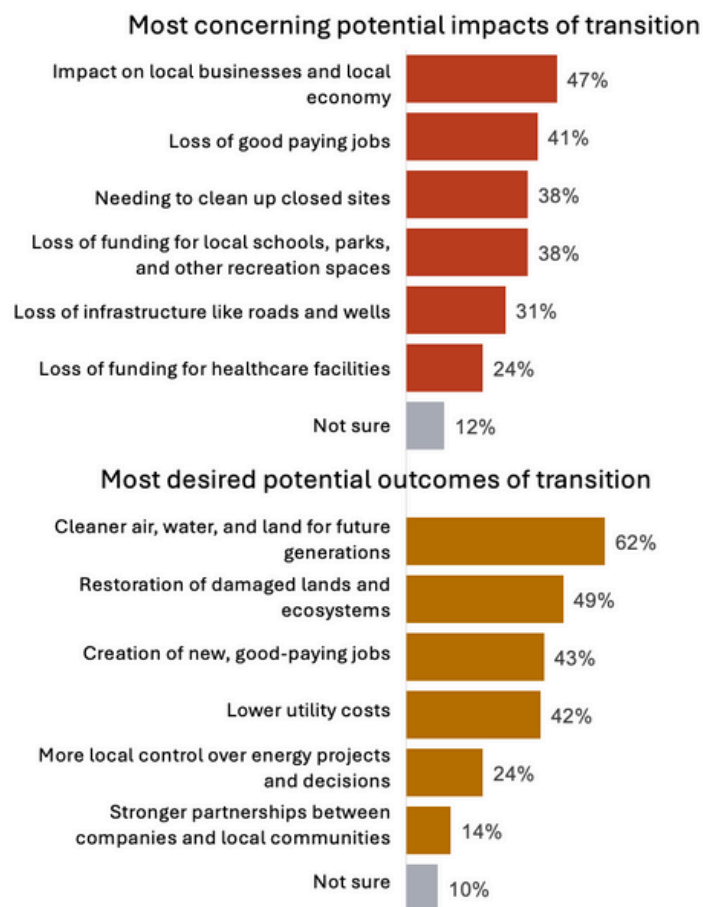
Concerns and priorities during an energy transition

Although a transition away from coal production is critical to ensuring that New Mexico can reach the goals set in the Energy Transition Act (ETA), Four Corners residents are concerned about the economic, social, educational, health, and environmental impacts such a transition may have on their communities. Although environmental impacts are considered important, the data shows that overwhelmingly, residents are concerned about how their own and community members’ livelihoods and quality of life may be impacted due to the shift, and hope that these will be prioritized during any transition.

When asked about the potential impacts of a complete transition away from coal, respondents expressed greatest concern about economic stability at the community level. Nearly half (47%) identified impacts on local businesses and the local economy as a top concern, followed by the loss of good-paying jobs (41%). A substantial share of residents were also concerned about longer-term liabilities associated with transition, including the need to clean up closed sites (38%) and the potential loss of funding for local schools, parks, and other recreation spaces (38%). Fewer respondents cited loss of infrastructure such as roads and wells (31%) or loss of funding for healthcare facilities (24%), though these concerns were still salient for a significant portion of the population. Taken together, these findings underscore that residents are primarily focused on how a transition could affect economic vitality, public services, and long-term community stability.

At the same time, respondents articulated a clear vision for the positive changes they hope a transition away from coal could bring. The most frequently selected outcome was cleaner air, water, and land for future generations (62%), followed by restoration of damaged lands and ecosystems (49%). Economic opportunities also featured prominently, with 43% of respondents prioritizing the creation of new, good-paying jobs and 42% expressing interest in lower utility costs. Fewer respondents emphasized governance-related outcomes, such as increased local control over energy projects and decisions (24%) or stronger partnerships between companies and local communities (14%), though these remain important considerations for a subset of residents.

Concerns about the impacts of a transition away from coal varied across demographic and experiential groups. Younger residents were disproportionately concerned about the potential loss of good-paying jobs and the loss of infrastructure such as roads and wells, reflecting heightened sensitivity to economic stability and long-term opportunity. Men were more likely than women to express concern about impacts on the local economy, further underscoring the central role economic security plays in perceptions of transition. Respondents who work in the energy industry, or who have close connections to someone who does, expressed particularly strong concern about job loss, highlighting the direct stakes many households have in how an energy transition is managed.



When asked about desired outcomes, Native respondents were more likely to prioritize restoration of damaged lands and ecosystems and cleaner air, water, and land for future generations. These benefits were also disproportionately selected by Democrats. Together, these findings suggest that while economic concerns shape perceptions of risk, visions of opportunity are often rooted in environmental restoration and long-term community wellbeing.

Spotlight on New Mexico

New Mexico residents were more likely than residents in other Four Corners states to express concern about impacts on the local economy, cleanup costs, and the loss of infrastructure such as roads and wells, while being less likely to cite the loss of good-paying jobs as a primary concern. At the same time, New Mexicans were more likely to identify job creation as a key opportunity associated with an energy transition, suggesting a forward-looking emphasis on rebuilding local economies rather than solely preserving existing employment.

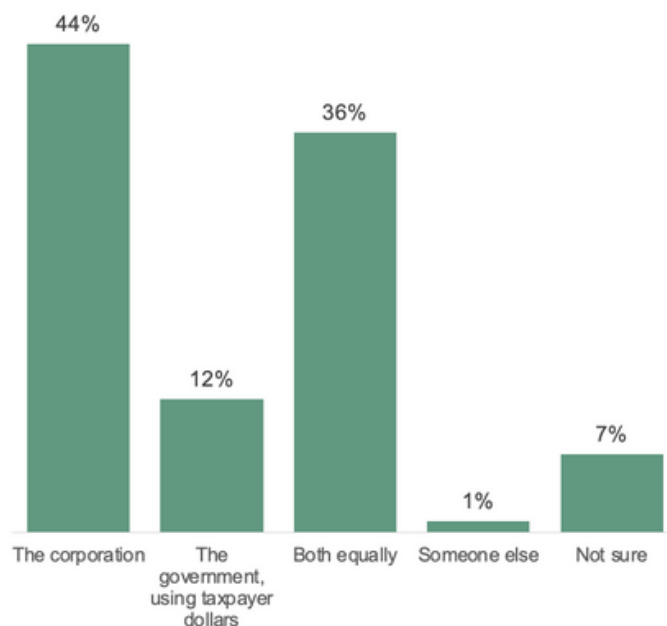
Who should be responsible for site cleanup

As energy projects reach the end of their operational life, communities are often left to contend with site cleanup, environmental remediation, and long-term impacts. To understand how residents think responsibility for this work should be allocated, the survey asked who should pay for and ensure cleanup when energy projects end.

When asked who should pay for and ensure cleanup after an energy project ends, a plurality of respondents (44%) indicated that the corporation should be responsible, while more than a third (36%) believed responsibility should be shared equally between corporations and government. Far fewer respondents (12%) felt cleanup should be funded primarily through taxpayer dollars, and only a small share selected another option or were unsure.

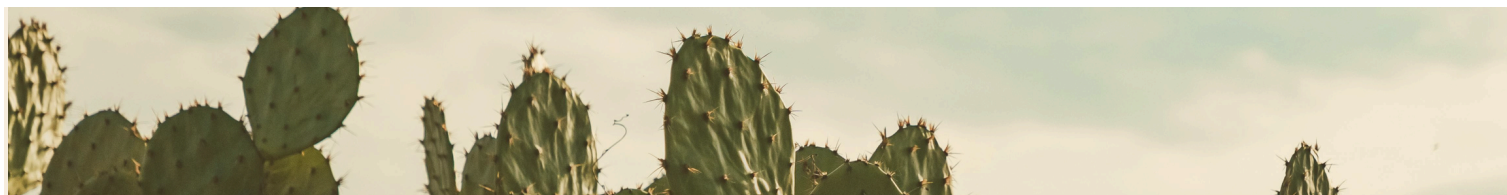
Views on responsibility varied across demographic and experiential groups. White respondents, older residents, and those with higher levels of education were more likely to place responsibility on corporations, as were respondents who do not work in the energy industry and do not have close connections to someone who does. In contrast, younger respondents and Native residents were more likely to identify government as responsible for cleanup, while Hispanic respondents were more likely to support a shared responsibility model.

Who should be responsible for site cleanup



Spotlight on New Mexico

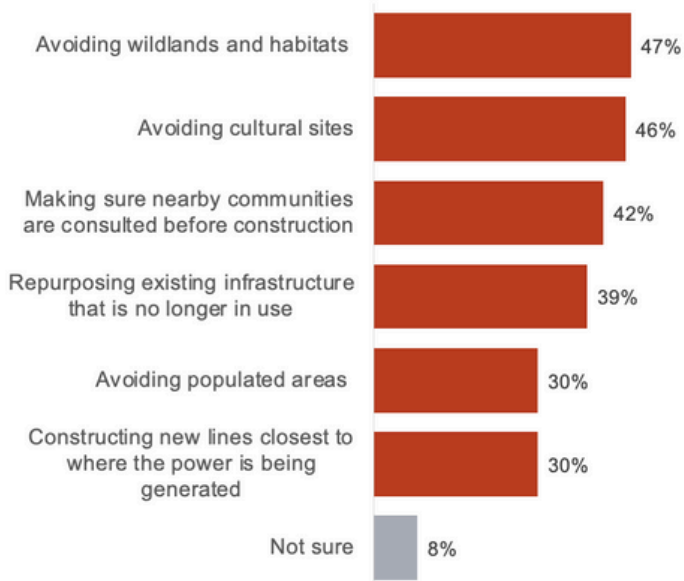
New Mexico residents were more likely than residents in other Four Corners states to favor shared responsibility between corporations and government.



Energy Transmission and Infrastructure Priorities

Because the Four Corners region produces energy that is transmitted both within the region and to other states, decisions about transmission infrastructure have direct and lasting impacts on local communities. To better understand community priorities related to energy transmission, the survey first asked residents what considerations should guide where new transmission infrastructure is built. It then asked who residents believe should be responsible for improving local access to electricity and clean water. Together, these questions provide insight into how communities think about environmental protection, community involvement, and accountability in the context of energy transmission.

Priorities for transmission infrastructure siting



Spotlight on New Mexico

Compared to respondents in other Four Corners states, New Mexicans were less likely to prioritize avoiding wildlands, habitats, and cultural sites, and more likely to emphasize community consultation and siting infrastructure closer to where power is generated. Together, these patterns suggest that infrastructure planning priorities are shaped by cultural context, economic experience, and geographic considerations, reinforcing the need for flexible, locally responsive transmission planning approaches.



Priorities for transmission infrastructure siting

When asked to identify top priorities for siting new energy transmission infrastructure, respondents most frequently emphasized minimizing environmental and cultural impacts. Nearly half of residents prioritized avoiding wildlands and habitats (47%) and avoiding cultural sites (46%), underscoring strong concern for protecting natural resources and culturally significant places. A substantial share of respondents (42%) also emphasized the importance of consulting nearby communities before construction begins, highlighting expectations for meaningful community involvement in infrastructure planning.

In addition to impact avoidance and consultation, many residents expressed a preference for efficient use of existing assets. Nearly four in ten respondents (39%) prioritized repurposing existing infrastructure that is no longer in use, suggesting interest in reducing new disturbance where possible. Fewer respondents selected avoiding populated areas (30%) or constructing new lines closest to where power is generated (30%), indicating that while proximity and population density matter, they are secondary to environmental protection and community engagement for many residents. Overall, these findings point to a strong preference for transmission planning that centers environmental stewardship, cultural preservation, and early community consultation.

Native respondents were more likely to prioritize protection of cultural sites, reflecting the importance of safeguarding places of cultural and historical significance. White respondents more frequently emphasized repurposing existing infrastructure, while Hispanic respondents were more likely to prioritize siting new transmission lines closer to where power is generated. Younger residents and respondents with ties to the energy industry were also more likely to favor repurposing existing infrastructure, suggesting an interest in efficiency and minimizing disruption. In contrast, respondents without ties to the energy industry placed greater emphasis on ensuring that nearby communities are consulted before construction begins, highlighting expectations for inclusive decision-making.

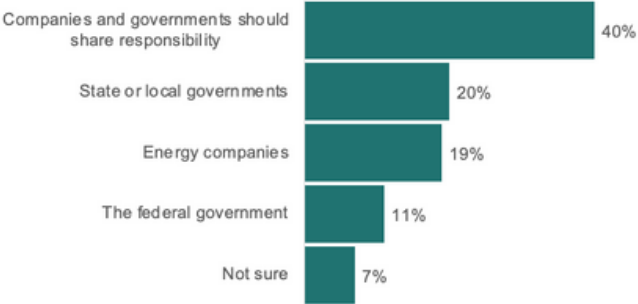
Responsibility for improving access to electricity and clean water

When asked who should be most responsible for improving access to electricity and clean water in the Four Corners region, respondents most often supported a shared responsibility model. Four in ten residents (40%) indicated that companies and governments should share responsibility, while one in five (20%) placed responsibility primarily on state or local governments. Fewer respondents identified energy companies alone (19%) or the federal government (11%) as primarily responsible, and only a small share selected another option or were unsure.

Responses varied across demographic groups. White respondents were more likely to assign responsibility to energy companies, while women were more likely to support shared responsibility. Men, conservatives, and younger respondents were more likely to place responsibility on state or local governments, suggesting differing views on the appropriate scale of accountability and governance.

The Four Corners region produces and sends energy to other states through transmission lines and pipelines. Some people believe that companies that develop or send energy should also help improve local access to electricity and clean water, while others think that should be the government’s role.

In your opinion, who should be most responsible for improving access to electricity and clean water in the Four Corners region:



Spotlight on New Mexico

Compared to respondents in other Four Corners states, New Mexicans were less likely to support shared responsibility or federal involvement and more likely to select “someone else.”



Just Energy Transition Messaging

Across a set of statements testing values and framing related to energy transition, respondents expressed consistently high levels of agreement. Between 79% and 85% of residents agreed with each statement, indicating broad alignment around principles of community inclusion, environmental responsibility, and fairness in the transition away from fossil fuels.

The strongest agreement was observed for statements emphasizing holistic and inclusive approaches. Fully 85% of respondents agreed that a successful energy transition should pay attention to environmental impacts, include clear planning, support a strong local economy, and incorporate many different voices. Similarly, 84% agreed that it is important for communities to share a common understanding of what “clean energy” means as the region transitions its energy system. These findings suggest strong support for framing energy transition as a coordinated, community-centered process rather than a purely technical or market-driven shift.

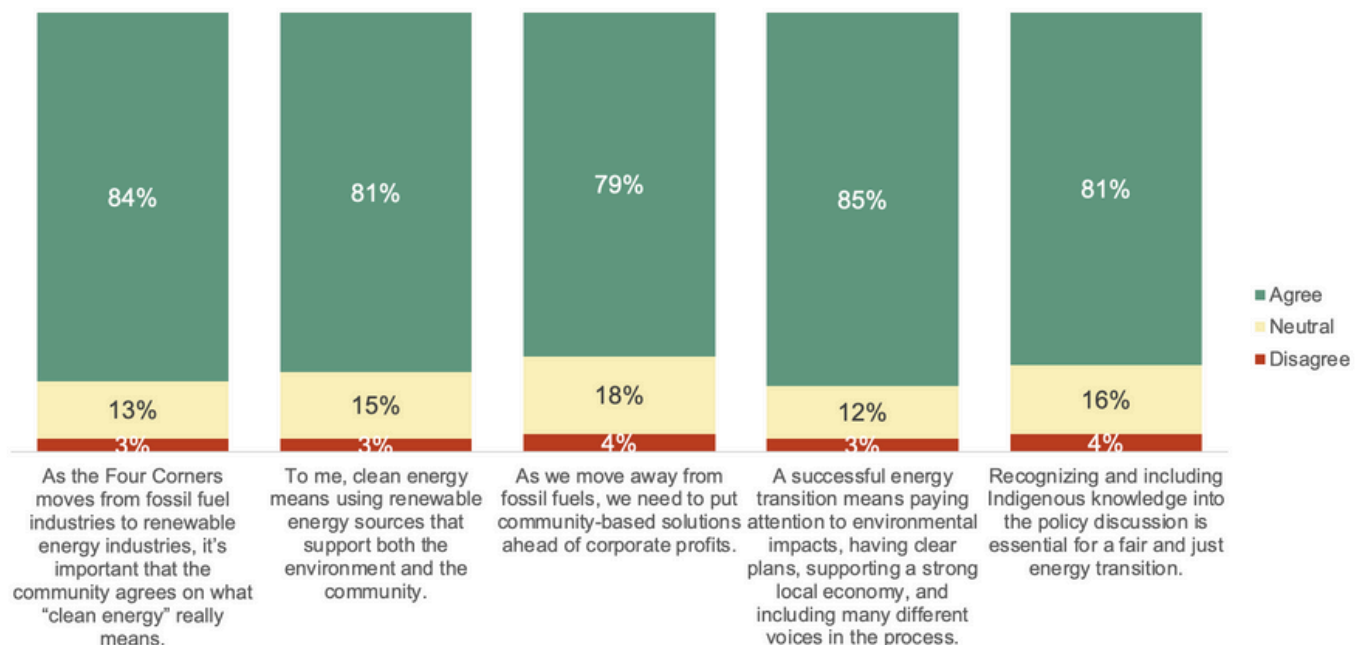
Respondents also expressed high agreement with equity- and values-based framing. More than eight in ten residents agreed that clean energy should support both the environment and the community (81%) and that Indigenous knowledge should be recognized and included in policy discussions as part of a fair and just transition (81%).

Nearly eight in ten respondents (79%) agreed that community-based solutions should be prioritized over corporate profits as fossil fuels are phased out. Neutral responses were consistently higher than disagreement across all statements, indicating that while some residents may be uncertain or still forming opinions, outright opposition to these frames is limited.

Across the message tests, differences by subgroup tended to reflect levels of certainty and underlying values rather than sharp disagreement. Men were somewhat more likely to express disagreement with statements related to defining clean energy and recognizing Indigenous knowledge. Meanwhile respondents with lower levels of education and those identifying as Independent were more likely to select neutral responses, suggesting less fixed views or lower confidence in these areas. These patterns point to variation in familiarity and framing, rather than outright opposition.



Agreement with messages about a just energy transition



Women and Native respondents were more likely to agree with statements that emphasized clean energy as benefiting both the environment and the community, and respondents without ties to the energy industry also expressed stronger agreement with this framing. In contrast, Republicans were more likely to disagree with definitions of clean energy that foreground community and environmental benefits, and with statements prioritizing community-based solutions over corporate profits. Respondents with higher levels of education were more likely to support community-centered approaches, including prioritizing community-based solutions.

Notably, there were minimal subgroup differences for the statement describing a successful energy transition as one that balances environmental impacts, economic stability, clear planning, and inclusive participation. This suggests broad alignment across demographic and political groups around a holistic, inclusive vision for energy transition, even where differences exist on specific definitions or values-based framing.

Spotlight on New Mexico

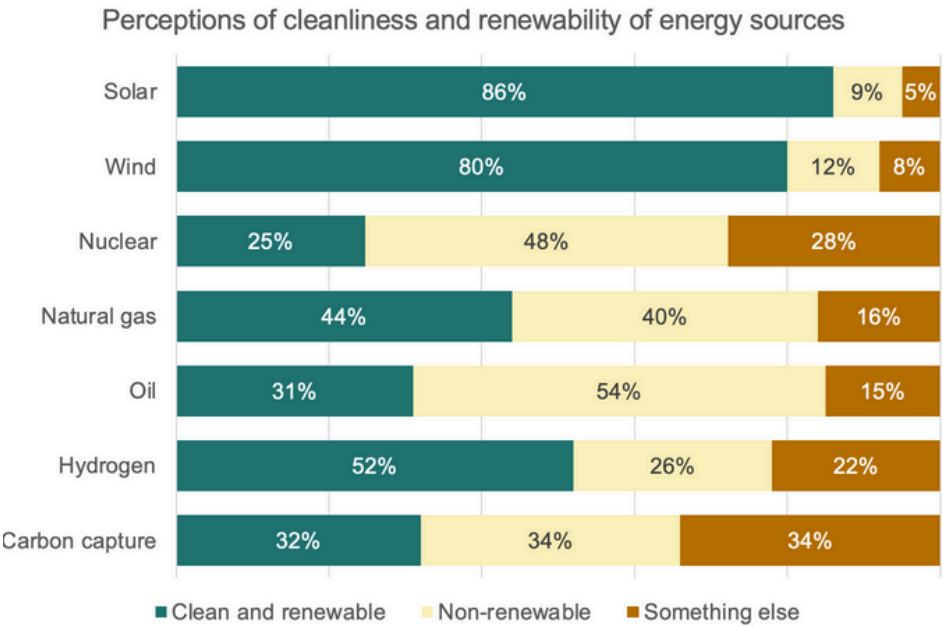
New Mexico residents showed somewhat different responses to several message tests compared to respondents in other Four Corners states. They were more likely to disagree that communities need a shared definition of “clean energy” and less likely to agree with statements framing clean energy as supporting both the environment and the community, indicating lower consensus around how clean energy is defined.

At the same time, New Mexico residents expressed similar levels of agreement with broader statements emphasizing inclusive planning, economic stability, environmental protection, and multi-voice decision-making. These findings suggest that while specific clean energy definitions may resonate less consistently, broader values-based approaches to energy transition remain widely supported in New Mexico.

Perceptions of cleanliness and renewability of energy sources

To understand how residents classify different energy sources and technologies, the survey asked respondents to identify whether a range of options are clean and renewable, non-renewable, or something else. Responses reveal clear areas of shared understanding alongside technologies where perceptions are more mixed, with important implications for how energy transition is communicated and discussed in the Four Corners region.

Respondents showed strong consensus around established renewable energy sources.



Large majorities identified solar (86%) and wind (80%) as clean and renewable, indicating broad alignment across demographic and political groups. This consistency suggests that solar and wind are widely understood and legible as renewable energy sources, and may therefore require less foundational explanation in community engagement efforts.

Perceptions of fossil fuel energy sources were more divided. While oil and natural gas were most often classified as non-renewable, substantial shares of respondents identified natural gas (44%) and oil (31%) as clean and renewable. These patterns were more pronounced among respondents with lower levels of education and among those with ties to the energy industry, suggesting that definitions of “clean energy” may be shaped by economic experience, familiarity, or exposure to industry framing rather than by technical classifications alone.

The greatest variation in perceptions emerged around nuclear energy, hydrogen, and carbon capture. These technologies were frequently categorized as “something else,” reflecting uncertainty or recognition that they do not fit neatly into binary clean versus non-renewable frameworks. Responses varied meaningfully by education level, political identity, and industry ties, underscoring that public understanding of these technologies is fragmented and context-dependent. Rather than indicating confusion alone, these patterns suggest that many residents recognize the complexity and tradeoffs associated with newer or less familiar energy technologies.

Taken together, these findings show strong shared understanding of solar and wind as clean energy sources, alongside far less settled perceptions of fossil fuels and emerging technologies. This highlights the need for technology-specific communication that addresses local impacts and benefits, economic realities, and the tradeoffs associated with more complex energy options.

Spotlight on New Mexico

Compared to respondents in other Four Corners states, New Mexico residents were more likely to classify several energy sources as “something else” rather than clean and renewable or non-renewable. This was particularly true for wind, natural gas, oil, and carbon capture, suggesting greater uncertainty or more nuanced views about how these technologies fit into existing energy categories. New Mexicans were also more likely to classify nuclear energy as non-renewable.



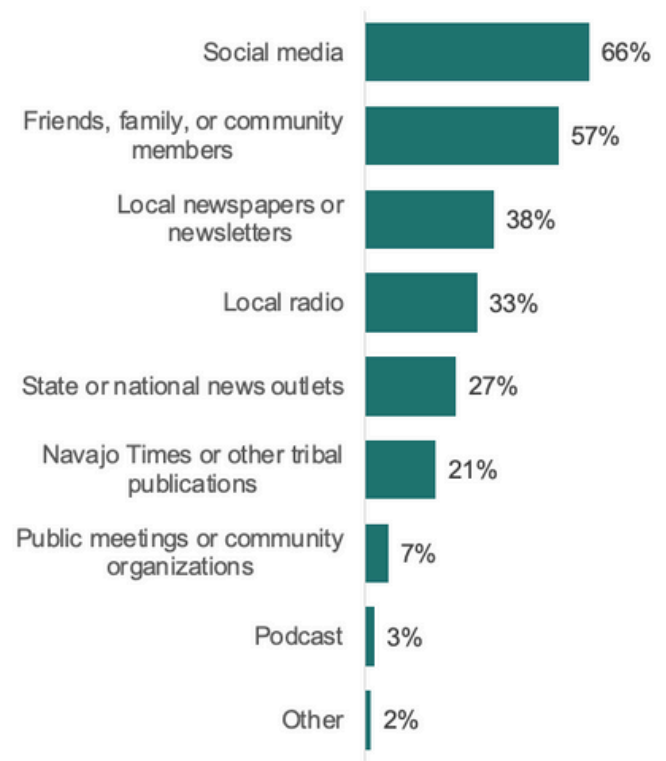
Where residents get their news

To understand how residents stay informed about what is happening in their communities, the survey asked where people typically get their news or information. Overall, residents rely most heavily on informal and digital sources. Social media was the most frequently cited source (66%), followed by friends, family, or community members (57%), underscoring the central role of personal networks and online platforms in local information sharing. Traditional local media also remain important, with more than a third of respondents citing local newspapers or newsletters (38%) and local radio (33%). Smaller shares reported relying on state or national news outlets (27%) or tribal publications such as the Navajo Times (21%). Very few respondents cited public meetings or community organizations (7%), podcasts (3%), or other sources, which included television, the Nextdoor app, or not actively following the news.

Patterns of information sources varied across demographic and political groups. Women were more likely to report getting information from friends, family, and community members, while Native respondents were more likely to cite both social media and tribal publications as sources of local information. White respondents were more likely to rely on word of mouth, reinforcing the importance of informal networks across communities.

Younger residents disproportionately relied on social media, whereas older respondents and those with higher levels of education were more likely to report getting information from local newspapers or newsletters. Democrats were more likely to cite social media as well as public meetings or community organizations, suggesting greater engagement with both digital and civic information channels.

Where do you usually get news or information about what's happening in your community?



Spotlight on New Mexico

New Mexico residents differed from other Four Corners respondents in several key ways. They were less likely to report getting information from friends, family, or community members, tribal publications, or public meetings and community organizations. These patterns suggest that informal and community-based information channels may play a relatively less prominent role in New Mexico compared to other parts of the Four Corners region.



Recommendations & Conclusion

Recommendations

These recommendations reflect patterns that emerged consistently across the survey and are intended to support inclusive, community-centered engagement .

Engage communities early and meaningfully

Engagement should begin before projects are proposed or as early as possible in planning. Early involvement increases legitimacy, reduces conflict, and allows community priorities to shape project design rather than respond to predetermined decisions.

Rely on trusted local messengers

Project information should be shared through trusted local messengers, including community leaders, tribal leaders and governments, and local media. Energy companies and agencies should partner with these intermediaries rather than relying solely on direct communication.

Offer multiple, accessible engagement options

Effective engagement requires a mix of formats, including town halls, surveys, public tours, and participation in existing local events. Providing multiple options helps reach diverse communities and reduces barriers to participation.

Make language access and clarity a baseline requirement

All project information should be accessible regardless of language or technical familiarity. Plain language, translated materials, and culturally appropriate communication should be treated as core engagement components.

Design Community Benefit Agreements around both immediate and long-term needs

CBAs should prioritize near-term benefits such as local hiring and community investment while also supporting workforce development, training, and environmental restoration. Agreements should be tailored through direct community input.

Address economic and workforce impacts directly

Planning and engagement should clearly address concerns about jobs, local economies, and public funding. Workforce development and job creation should be positioned as central to transition strategies.

Tailor communication by energy technology

Engagement strategies should vary by technology. Solar and wind discussions can focus on siting and local impacts, while fossil fuel, nuclear, hydrogen, and carbon capture projects require clearer explanations of tradeoffs, benefits, and limitations.

Center environmental protection, cultural preservation, and consultation in transmission planning

Transmission siting should prioritize avoiding environmental and cultural impacts, repurposing existing infrastructure, and consulting communities before construction. These considerations should be foundational, not secondary.

Clarify responsibility for cleanup and long-term impacts

Clear accountability for site cleanup and remediation should be established upfront. Communities expect corporations to bear primary responsibility, either independently or in partnership with government.

Invest in sustained, two-way communication

Engagement should be ongoing rather than one-time. Communication strategies should evolve over the life of a project and respond to community questions, concerns, and feedback.

Conclusion

This research shows that residents of the Four Corners are not disengaged from conversations about energy transition. Instead, they are attentive to how change happens, who is involved, and whether communities see tangible benefits as the region's energy landscape evolves. Across the survey, residents expressed concern for environmental impacts, economic stability, and long-term community wellbeing, alongside a strong desire for meaningful engagement that is early, inclusive, and grounded in trust.

The findings make clear that there is no single narrative, messenger, or engagement strategy that will resonate across all communities. Perceptions of energy technologies, definitions of clean energy, and priorities for transition vary based on lived experience, economic ties, and local context. At the same time, there is broad alignment around shared values, including the importance of protecting land and water, supporting workers and local economies, and ensuring that communities have a voice in decisions that affect them.

For nonprofits, funders, and others working to advance a clean and just energy transition, these findings underscore the importance of centering community knowledge, respecting complexity, and investing in processes that build long-term relationships rather than one-time outreach. Transition efforts that are responsive to local priorities, transparent about tradeoffs, and accountable to the communities most affected are more likely to earn trust and lead to durable outcomes.

As the Four Corners continues to navigate change in its energy systems, this report offers a foundation for engagement that is rooted in listening, care, and shared responsibility. The path forward is not defined by a single solution, but by the quality of the conversations and partnerships that shape it.



Appendix A - Respondent Demographics

Length of residency in Four Corners

Less than 1 year	5%
1-3 years	8%
4-10 years	21%
More than 10 years	66%

Age

18-29	25%
30-39	25%
40-49	15%
50-59	13%
60+	22%

Race/Ethnicity

White	31%
Hispanic	24%
Native American	41%
Other	4%

Education

Some high school	9%
High school graduate or GED	39%
Some college/associate degree/vocational certificate	31%
College graduate (4 years)	12%
Graduate or professional degree	8%

Gender

Man	46%
Woman	53%
Non-binary/other	1%

Household income

Less than \$25,000	26%
\$25,000 to \$39,999	17%
\$40,000 to \$59,999	13%
\$60,000 to \$79,999	16%
\$80,000 to \$99,999	15%
\$100,000 or more	7%

Connection to energy industry

I work in the energy industry	3%
Immediate family members work in the energy industry	8%
Relatives/friends work in the energy industry	21%
I don't know anyone who works in the energy industry	59%

What part of energy industry?

Respondents could chose all that apply

Oil & gas	67%
Coal	32%
Renewable energy	28%

Party	
Republican	21%
Democrat	26%
Independent	36%
Other	7%

Ideology	
Conservative	24%
Moderate	47%
Liberal	15%

Appendix B - Survey Instrument

San Juan Citizens Alliance Community Energy Plan Survey 2025

We're conducting a survey to gauge public input about energy and community issues in the Four Corners region. Your feedback will help ensure local voices are represented as the area plans for the future of energy and economic development.

A. What state do you live in?

1. Arizona **(skip to B1)**
2. Colorado **(skip to B2)**
3. New Mexico **(skip to B3)**
4. Utah **(skip to B4)**
5. Some other state **(thank and terminate)**

B1. What county do you live in?

1. Apache County
2. Navajo County
3. Some other Arizona county **(thank and terminate)**

B2. What county do you live in?

1. La Plata County
2. Montezuma County
3. Some other Colorado county **(thank and terminate)**

B3. What county do you live in?

1. McKinley County
2. Rio Arriba County
3. San Juan County
4. Some other New Mexico county **(thank and terminate)**

B4. What county do you live in?

1. San Juan County
2. Some other Utah county **(thank and terminate)**

1. Where do you usually get news or information about what's happening in your community?
Select all that apply.

1. Friends, family, or community members
2. Social media (Facebook, TikTok, etc.)
3. Local radio
4. Local newspapers or newsletters
5. Navajo Times or other tribal publications
6. State or national news outlets
7. Public meetings or community organizations
8. Podcast
9. Other (please specify) - meetings

In the past 12 months, have you heard, read, or seen anything about any of the following in the Four Corners region: (Randomize)	Yes	No	Not sure
2. Coal energy operations in the Four Corners region? (Like the San Juan Generating Station, Four Corners Power Plant, Navajo Mine, San Juan Mine)	1	2	3
3. Solar energy projects being developed in the Four Corners region? (Like the Sunbelt Project or San Juan Solar)	1	2	3
4. Hydrogen pipeline projects in the Four Corners region? (like the Tallgrass project near Shiprock?)	1	2	3
5. The Navajo Transitional Energy Company	1	2	3
6. The concept of a “just energy transition” - meaning efforts to move away from fossil fuels in a way that supports workers and communities from those industries	1	2	3

7. **(If YES to any of the above)** Where have you heard or read about these topics? (Select all that apply)

1. Friends, family, or community members
2. Social media (Facebook, TikTok, etc.)
3. Local radio
4. Local newspapers or newsletters
5. Navajo Times or other tribal publications
6. State or national news outlets
7. Public meetings or community organizations

8. Podcast
9. Other (please specify)

7. In the last 2 years, would you say the air quality in the Four Corners area has:

1. Improved a lot
2. Improved a little
3. Stayed the same
4. Gotten a little worse
5. Gotten a lot worse
6. Not sure

8. Some people think local communities should be part of decisions about new or proposed energy projects in their area, while others think that these decisions should be left to elected officials and the companies involved in these industries

When do you think local communities should be consulted about new energy projects, if at all?

1. Before a project is even proposed
2. As soon as a project is proposed
3. After plans are developed but before construction begins
4. If major concerns or opposition form after the project is proposed
5. Communities don't need to be consulted (**skip to Q11**)
6. Not sure

9. Who do you trust the most to provide information about new energy projects in your community? Select up to three responses.

1. The local media
2. Local community leaders
3. Tribal leaders or tribal governments
4. Local governmental officials
5. Community organizations or nonprofits
6. Energy companies
7. Friends and family in my network
8. Podcasts
9. Other (please specify)
10. Not sure

10. In your opinion, what is the best way for energy companies to engage with local communities when planning new energy projects? Select up to three responses.

1. Town Halls and Public Forums
2. Online meetings or webinars
3. Panel discussions with an opportunity to ask questions/give comments
4. Community surveys
5. Giving public tours of proposed project sites
6. Workshops
7. Newspaper or radio advertising
8. Town or city events such as rodeos
9. Other (please specify)

11. How important is it for companies to make sure everyone in the community can understand project information, no matter what language they read or speak?

1. Very important
2. Somewhat important
3. Not too important
4. Not important at all

12. If the Four Corners were to completely transition away from coal, which potential impacts on your community are you most concerned about? Select up to 3 responses.

1. Loss of funding for local schools, parks, and other recreation spaces
2. Loss of funding for healthcare facilities
3. Loss of good paying jobs
4. Needing to clean up closed sites
5. Loss of infrastructure like roads and wells
6. Impact on local businesses and local economy
7. Other (please specify)

13. If the Four Corners were to completely transition away from coal production, what positive changes or opportunities would you most like to see in your community? Select up to 3 responses.

1. Creation of new, good-paying jobs

2. Lower utility costs
3. Cleaner air, water, and land for future generations
4. Restoration of damaged lands and ecosystems
5. More local control over energy projects and decisions
6. Stronger partnerships between companies and local communities
7. Other (please specify)

14. A Community Benefit Agreement (CBA) is an agreement that helps ensure new projects benefit the people who live in the area. It outlines what the community will receive in return for allowing the project to move forward.

Which of the following community benefits do you think are most important to include? Select up to 2 responses.

1. Prioritize hiring local residents where projects are developed
2. Invest directly in community services and facilities, such as schools, parks, healthcare, and infrastructure
3. Restore land and reduce environmental impacts caused by the project
4. Offer training and apprenticeship opportunities for young people and other community members
5. Other (please specify)

15. The Four Corners region produces and sends energy to other states through transmission lines and pipelines. Some people believe that companies that develop or send energy should also help improve local access to electricity and clean water, while others think that should be the government's role.

In your opinion, who should be most responsible for improving access to electricity and clean water in the Four Corners region:

1. Energy companies
2. State or local governments
3. The federal government
4. Companies and governments should share responsibility
5. Someone else

16. There is a lot of infrastructure that has to be built to carry electricity from here in the Four Corner areas to other states, including power lines, towers, and substations. Which of the following

should be the top priorities when deciding where to build that infrastructure? (Select up to three responses)

1. Repurposing existing infrastructure that is no longer in use
2. Avoiding wildlands and habitats
3. Avoiding populated areas
4. Avoiding cultural sites
5. Constructing new lines closest to where the power is being generated
6. Making sure nearby communities are consulted before construction
7. Other (specify)
8. Not sure

17. When it comes to producing energy in the future, do you think your state's government should:

1. Phase out the use of fossil fuels completely
2. Use a mix of fossil fuels and renewable energy sources
3. Neither/something else
4. Not sure

18. When an energy project ends and the site needs cleanup because of leftover contamination or damage, who should pay for and make sure that work gets done?

1. The corporation
2. The government, using taxpayer dollars
3. Both equally
4. Someone else
5. Not sure

Please rate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements: (Randomize)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
19. As the Four Corners moves from fossil fuel industries to renewable energy industries, it's important that the community agrees on what "clean energy" really means.	5	4	3	2	1

20. To me, clean energy means using renewable energy sources that support both the environment and the community.	5	4	3	2	1
21. As we move away from fossil fuels, we need to put community-based solutions ahead of corporate profits.	5	4	3	2	1
22. A successful energy transition means paying attention to environmental impacts, having clear plans, supporting a strong local economy, and including many different voices in the process.	5	4	3	2	1
23. Recognizing and including Indigenous knowledge into the policy discussion is essential for a fair and just energy transition.	5	4	3	2	1

Please rate how concerned you are about the impact the following may have on your community: (Randomize)	Extremely concerned	Moderately concerned	Somewhat concerned	Slightly concerned	Not at all concerned
24. Climate change	5	4	3	2	1
25. Water scarcity and drought	5	4	3	2	1
26. Extreme heat	5	4	3	2	1
27. Less access to clean air	5	4	3	2	1
28. Less access to clean drinking water	5	4	3	2	1
29. Wildfires	5	4	3	2	1

Thinking about the following sources of energy production, please tell me if you consider them to be energy sources that are	Clean and Renewable	Non-Renewable	Something else
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clean and renewable, non-renewable, or something else			
30. Solar	1	2	3
31. Wind	1	2	3
32. Nuclear	1	2	3
33. Natural Gas	1	2	3
34. Oil	1	2	3
35. Hydrogen	1	2	3
36. Carbon Capture	1	2	3

The following questions are for statistical purposes only

37. How long have you lived in the Four Corners area?

1. Less than 1 year
2. 1–3 years
3. 4–10 years
4. More than 10 years

38. What is your gender?

5. Man
6. Woman
7. Non-binary
8. Other
9. Prefer not to say

39. What race or ethnicity do you consider yourself to be?

1. White
2. Hispanic/Latino
3. Native American
4. Black/African American
5. Asian/Pacific Islander

6. Other
7. Prefer not to say

40. **(If Native American in Q37)** Do you live on or near tribal lands or a reservation?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Prefer not to say

41. Into which age category do you fit?

1. 18-24
2. 25-34
3. 35-44
4. 45-54
5. 55-64
6. 65+
7. Prefer not to say

42. Which of the following best describes your total household income?

1. Less than \$25,000
2. \$25,000 to \$39,999
3. \$40,000 to \$59,999
4. \$60,000 to \$79,999
5. \$80,000 to \$99,999
6. \$100,000 or more
7. Prefer not to say

43. What is the highest level of education you have had an opportunity to complete?

1. Some high school
2. High school graduate or GED
3. Some college/associate degree/vocational certificate
4. College graduate (4 years)
5. Graduate or professional degree (Masters, J.D. M.D., PhD)
6. Prefer not to say

44. Do you or a family member work in the energy industry? (please check all that apply)

1. I work in the energy industry
2. Immediate family members work in the energy industry
3. Relatives/friends work in the energy industry
4. I don't know anyone who works in the energy industry (**skip to 44**)
5. Prefer not to say

45. What part of the energy industry?

1. Oil and gas
2. Coal
3. Renewable energy
4. Other (please specify)

46. Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a:

5. Republican
6. Democrat
7. Independent
8. Other party
9. Prefer not to say

47. Do you consider yourself to be more conservative, moderate or liberal on most issues?

1. Conservative
2. Moderate
3. Liberal
4. Prefer not to say