

N E W M E X I C O



Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department

Public Policy Forum
Rural and Tribal Land
Electrification

February 25, 2026 | Española, NM | NNMC

Post Forum Report

OVERVIEW

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of key discussion items from February 25, 2026, meeting in Española, NM, titled Rural and Tribal Land Electrification. The three-hour meeting was convened to capture a variety of viewpoints, recommendations and actions related to energy public policy in New Mexico. Stakeholders represented a variety of areas including state government agencies, non-governmental organizations, academia, tribal representatives and industry. Forty-eight people attended. Registrants were asked to complete a pre-survey prior to attending the event. (See Appendix A for survey results.)

SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS

Two area subject matter experts (SMEs) provided brief presentations at the beginning of the meeting. Vince Martinez, CEO of the New Mexico Rural Electric Cooperative Association, and Wayne Yazza, former governor of Picuris Pueblo and current Picuris Utilities Director.

Key themes and information came out of the SME presentations, including the following:

- Rural electric cooperatives provide electricity to their members in rural and undeserved areas where investor-owned utilities do not operate. There are 16 rural electric cooperatives in New Mexico that get their energy from Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association and Western Farmers Electric Cooperative.
- Rural electric cooperatives are not-for-profit, member-owned and member-governed with an elected board of directors.
- Rural electric cooperatives serve 80 percent of the land area in New Mexico, including a large percentage of northern New Mexico through Jemez Mountains Electric Cooperative, Kit Carson Electric Cooperative, Mora San Miguel Electric Cooperative, Northern Rio Arriba Electric Cooperative, Spring Electric Cooperative, Southwestern Electric Cooperative, Farmers Electric Cooperative and Continental Divide Electric Cooperative.
- Rural electric cooperatives experience unique challenges in delivering electricity as there are much fewer customers/members per square mile than found with other kinds of utilities, such as investor-owned utilities. This does not reduce the need for infrastructure to serve customers.
- Rural electric cooperatives have made significant progress toward meeting New Mexico's renewable energy targets, with more than 50 percent of their portfolio coming from renewable energy.
- Picuris Pueblo is located 60 miles north of Santa Fe and 24 miles southeast of Taos. The pueblo has approximately 300 enrolled members.
- Picuris Pueblo developed a 1 megawatt (MW) photovoltaic system in 2017. This system provides electricity to Kit Carson Electric Cooperative through a power purchase agreement. The pueblo added a 750-kilowatt (kW) system through a cost-sharing agreement with the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) in 2025 that is completed and awaiting final commissioning. This system is specifically dedicated to serving the pueblo's energy demand.
- In 2026, Picuris Pueblo will be adding an additional one MW/four megawatt hours (MWh) of energy storage that will eventually be part of a self-sustaining grid-connected microgrid.
- These projects at the pueblo have included training tribal members for various roles to operate these systems. and the pueblo wants to share this knowledge with other pueblos. The projects also align with their tribal values including a deep connection to Mother Earth, sovereignty and self-determination, breaking dependency on third-party energy infrastructure, and providing protection from external threats such as wildfires and cybersecurity issues that can impact grid reliability.

FORUM CHALLENGE STATEMENT

Problem statement: Northern New Mexico has many opportunities to be part of New Mexico's clean energy transition. The region has also experienced some economic downturns due to mine closures and other industry challenges. This forum will discuss some of the initiatives already underway, planned future projects in the region, and explore what policies could further help tribes, pueblos, nations, and rural communities in New Mexico's energy transition.

New Mexico is home to many tribes, pueblos and nations, land grant areas and rural communities that are served by rural electric cooperatives, investor-owned utilities and some municipally owned utilities. The northern region is starting to be part of a strong energy transition with the addition of solar and storage, electric vehicle charging stations, proposed transmission projects and opportunities for additional clean energy projects. For example, Picuris Pueblo developed a 1-megawatt (MW) community solar array in 2017, using a combination of funds from DOE and a conventional loan. The energy goes directly into the Kit Carson Electric Cooperative utility grid. The tribe receives its revenue from its power purchase agreement with Kit Carson Electric Cooperative.

SUMMARIES OF FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS (See Pages 3 – 6)

See Appendix B for Available Resources Surfaced in Forum.

INDUSTRY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES

- Many of New Mexico's tribes, pueblos and nations do not have the expertise to know how to engage in the clean energy transition. The State of New Mexico needs to conduct outreach and training specifically to tribes, pueblos and nations. This means going directly to the tribes versus inviting tribal leaders to a meeting. The State could also work with the American Indian Chamber of Commerce and the All Pueblo Council of Governors.
- The New Mexico Economic Development Department does not offer incentives for energy infrastructure development.
- The New Mexico State Investment Council is not investing enough in New Mexico companies.
- Geothermal has potential but a significant amount of resources are needed to further study where the best geothermal sites for energy production. Geothermal projects are costly and companies don't always want to take the risks of doing the research.
- Rollbacks in resources available through the Inflation Reduction Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Act are hurting the clean energy industry. The state could fill in some of these gaps.
- Small rural communities do not have the expertise or resources to develop energy projects and need support and technical assistance.
- Rate design can be a challenge – who pays incurred infrastructure and delivery costs while maintaining affordability and managing fixed cost recovery, especially with large load-demand industries.

- Demand charges, fees based on the highest amount of electricity (kilowatts - kW) used during a single short interval in a billing cycle, rather than total energy consumption over the month, are an obstacle to high level electric vehicle charging unit installations. The rural electric cooperatives are seen as blocking community-based generation projects.
 - Basic equipment costs in the electric industry have increased dramatically, with core components like transformers and wire seeing price surges driven by supply chain disruptions, material costs, and increased demand.
 - Data centers are needing new locations and use a lot of electricity. Data centers may need to use gas fired generation resources first and geothermal could be a strong option for them in the future.
 - Senate Bill 235, the Microgrid Oversight Act, was introduced in the 2026 legislative session to address some of the issues that are surfacing related to data centers, including rate design, regulation and proposed percentages of renewables required on microgrids by target dates. The bill did not make it through the session. See the bill [here](#).
 - Rural electric cooperatives are not getting a place at the table on state energy policy and grant opportunities.
 - Better, longer-lasting batteries are needed for long-term storage and reliability. There are opportunities with pumped hydro, compressed air, and flow batteries.
 - The challenge with renewable energy is that much more infrastructure needs to be built to accommodate demand (i.e. the wind doesn't blow all the time, the sun doesn't shine all the time). However, permitting issues present challenges for getting projects done.
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WORKFORCE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- The current funding model for higher educational institutions is complex and outdated. Educational institutions need funds for building capacity to offer different kinds of training and education to various populations.
- There are opportunities to start reaching out to, and training, the incarcerated population to fill important trade skills related professions. This needs to be included in all future workforce planning.
- By the time colleges are reaching out to potential students, they are finding a variety of challenges including lack of knowledge about careers, and challenges with youth experiencing substance abuse and other issues.
- There is a constant need for qualified instructors at higher education institutions. The pay for these instructors is not competitive with private industry resulting in recruiting challenges.
- There is a need for funding for career development in the energy sector.
- As part of energy policy, the state needs to look into the future about what kinds of employees will be needed to support the energy sector and identify policies that can help build this workforce in advance.
- Forty percent of the energy workforce in New Mexico is employed by the gas and oil industry.
- People need entry level positions with additional support such as pursuing a GED and ESL curriculum.
- Pattern Energy is partnering with Pecos school district to provide workforce development presentations focused on renewable energy careers, starting with middle school students to build early awareness of career pathways.

- UAE Local 412's mobile classroom unit has shown success in northern New Mexico with 10-week pre-apprenticeship programs. Graduates are placed at Los Alamos National Lab and other local employers, keeping trained workers in their communities.
- Kit Carson launched a pre-apprenticeship program providing paid 10-week infrastructure training in the community. Successful completers receive jobs with Kit Carson, ensuring trained workforce stays local rather than relocating for employment opportunities.

POLICY AND OTHER SOLUTIONS TO HELP ADDRESS FUTURE REGIONAL ENERGY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- The New Mexico State Investment Council should be required to place at least 30% of their venture capital choices into firms that will fund companies in New Mexico.
- Build closer relationships between employers and workforce development and skills training, specifically adult education providers. Students who seek these careers need to know they will have access to a career after completion.
- Demand-side management programs are becoming more advanced. They could work well with microgrid applications.
- Reach out to pueblos, tribes, nations, and rural communities where they are and bring technical and financial capacities to make plans and implement sustainable renewable energy systems.
- Add waste to energy generation to definition of clean energy in the Energy Transition Act.
- Provide state incentives for energy development on tribal and pueblo lands.
- Incentivize power plant construction and workforce development to meet rising energy demands such as tax credits, grants, low interest loan programs and eased regulations. Some states also incentivize energy storage and microgrids with similar programs. Many states are providing funding for pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs to support on-the-job learning and some states provide tax credits to businesses that hire and train apprentices.
- Provide technical assistance as part of any grant awards to pueblos, tribes and nations to help with knowledge gaps.
- Provide resources and support for pueblos, tribes, nations, rural communities and rural electric cooperatives so they can build capacity to initiate projects.
- Ensure that state funds applied to energy projects have a specific allocation for pueblos, tribes and nations.
- Require that the base salary for energy jobs starts at a minimum of \$25 an hour.
- Implement policy that ensures that polluters have to pay for clean-up of their environmental impacts.
- Regulate demand charges. *(Note: Demand charges are part of rate cases which are regulated by the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission (NMPRC). The Commission can further examine how demand charges are impacting the energy transition.)*
- Focus on policies that develop apprenticeship partnership programs to educate and bring talented workforce into the energy sector.

- Strengthen partnerships between the federal and state governments and pueblos, tribes and nations.
- Often large energy developers are not interested in working with small communities and rural electric cooperatives due to the scale of the project. The state could take a role in providing some kind of incentive for these companies to build projects in these areas. .
- There needs to be a better process for understanding and realizing the constraints that exist when crafting energy transition policies – economic, socioeconomic, workforce, tech transfer, etc.
- Define “local benefit” and include a local benefit requirement as an expense of leasing state land on tribal or pueblo land. (*Note: the State Land Office does not do leases on tribal lands.*)
- The New Mexico Economic Development Department needs a dedicated, full-time tribal liaison and a dedicated full time NM Energy, Minerals and Natural Resource Department liaison.
- New Mexico needs more solar combined with batteries and microgrids.
- A diversified generation portfolio is needed to serve the future needs of New Mexico.
- The New Mexico Public Regulation Commission should be forced to work with rural electric cooperatives, for example on rate cases.
- There need to be strong metrics for each proposed energy project to maximize state and federal grant proposals including the cost of the project, the energy profile, the impact on reliability, the impact on rates, environmental concerns, impact on local communities and other projects that might be affected such as required transmission.
- The role of natural gas needs to be discussed because it enables the use of solar and wind. Small nuclear and geothermal are also opportunities but have some near-term challenges.
- Explore role of developing carbon capture projects in New Mexico.
- Focus on improved outreach such as more partnerships with local media to spread the information about opportunities in energy projects, particularly regarding job opportunities and workforce development.
- Produced water could be used for construction and/or operation of smaller energy production systems.
- Fund the New Mexico Energy Initiatives Consortium which brings together energy stakeholders across New Mexico to advance energy research, education and outreach. <https://nm-secm.org/>
- Adopt a more realistic, science, technology, and equity-driven climate policy. Natural gas can be reliable and ample enough to meet demand. There are technologies to pair with natural gas to minimize or eliminate greenhouse gas emissions.
- Tribal and pueblo leaders need to work together and be at the table at important energy policy planning sessions. More effort should be made to get them there.
- There are opportunities for pueblos, tribes and nations to add power generation projects on their lands.
- Picuris Pueblo wants to serve as a model for training to teach other pueblos on renewable energy systems.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the Rural and Tribal Land Electrification forum highlighted both the significant opportunities and the complex challenges associated with advancing the clean energy transition in northern New Mexico. Participants emphasized the importance of expanding technical assistance, workforce development, and financial resources to support pueblos, tribes, nations, rural communities, and rural electric cooperatives. The discussion underscored the need for stronger collaboration among state agencies, tribal governments, industry, and educational institutions to ensure that energy policies are inclusive, practical, and responsive to regional needs. With targeted policy support, improved outreach, and continued investment in infrastructure and workforce capacity, northern New Mexico has the potential to play a meaningful role in the state's evolving energy landscape while advancing economic development, tribal sovereignty, and long-term grid resilience.

APPENDIX A



Rural & Tribal Electrification Survey

Condensed Summary | ~30 Respondents

Overall Signal

Strong cross-sector alignment around **reliability, affordability, tribal sovereignty, workforce development, and transmission modernization** as foundational to rural and tribal electrification in New Mexico.

Top Policy Priorities (Most Frequently Rated “Very Important”)

- Tribal sovereignty–aligned energy planning
- Transmission upgrades for rural and remote areas
- Protections to keep electricity affordable
- Incentives for distributed solar + storage
- State and federal grant funding
- Tribal financing and tax-credit pathways

Moderate but strong support:

- Cooperative/community financing

- Public-private partnerships

Mixed support:

- Private investment / green bonds
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Infrastructure Priorities (Ranked Highest)

1. Transmission upgrades & interconnection reform
2. Microgrids for critical facilities

3. Community-scale solar + storage
4. Grid automation & outage management
5. Distribution system modernization

Secondary:

- Energy efficiency programs
 - EV charging corridors
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Energy Storage Priorities

Most supported applications:

- Storage paired with distributed solar
- Storage for outage resilience
- Community-scale battery systems
- Storage to reduce peak demand costs

Frequently cited:

- Long-duration storage
 - Distributed in-home storage clusters
 - Islandable microgrids
 - Storage for clinics, water systems, emergency facilities
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Workforce Development (Top Selections)

- Solar, storage, and electrification training programs
- Partnerships with tribal colleges & community colleges
- Grid operations & line worker training
- Replication of cooperative & tribal energy models
- Apprenticeships and youth pipelines

Strong emphasis on:

- Long-term career pathways
- In-house tribal workforce capacity
- Native-led project development
- High-wage local jobs

Financing Themes

Highest support:

- State and federal grants
- Tribal financing pathways
- Cooperative/community models

Barriers identified:

- Administrative burden
- Interconnection costs passed to tribes
- Capital gap between feasibility and construction
- Need for braided funding across agencies
- Demand for centralized technical assistance (“one-stop shop”)

Expected Community Benefits (Most Frequently Selected)

- Affordable & stable energy costs
- Improved reliability & resilience
- Local, high-quality job creation
- Workforce career pathways
- Investment in local infrastructure
- Cleaner air & public health
- Inclusion in energy decision-making

Affordability + reliability appear in nearly all responses.

Recurring Cross-Cutting Themes

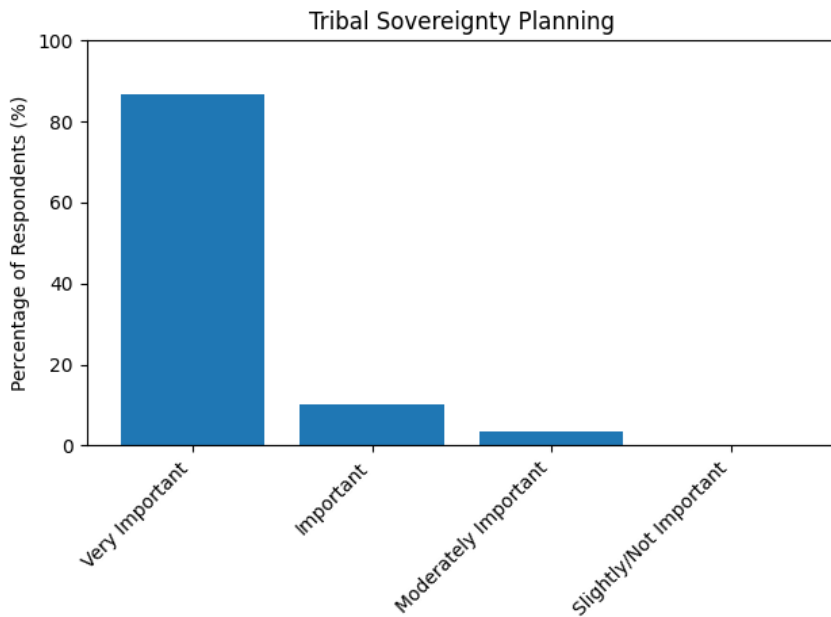
- Sovereignty-centered planning
- Respect for tribal land and culture
- Distributed energy systems over centralized models

- Microgrids with islanding capability
- Transmission as prerequisite infrastructure
- Workforce development tied to economic diversification
- Need for durable, long-term policy frameworks

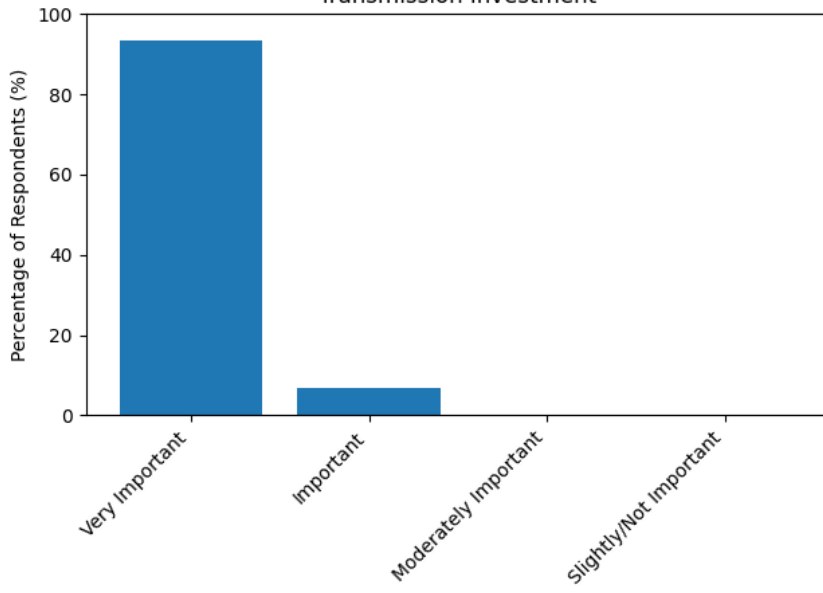
Core Finding:

Stakeholder alignment is strong. The primary barriers are capital access, technical assistance capacity, interconnection reform, and implementation infrastructure — not policy vision.

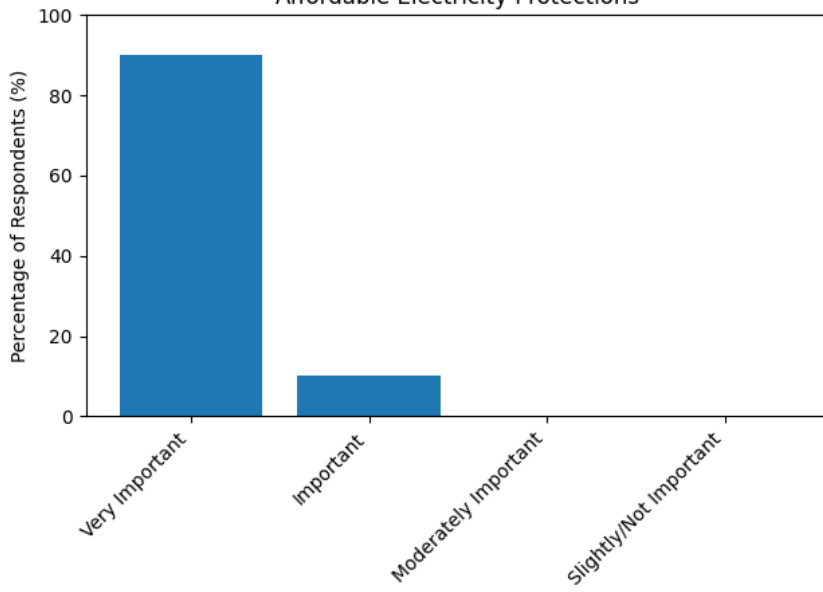
Rural & Tribal Electrification Survey
 Policy Importance – Percentage Distribution (Board Briefing)



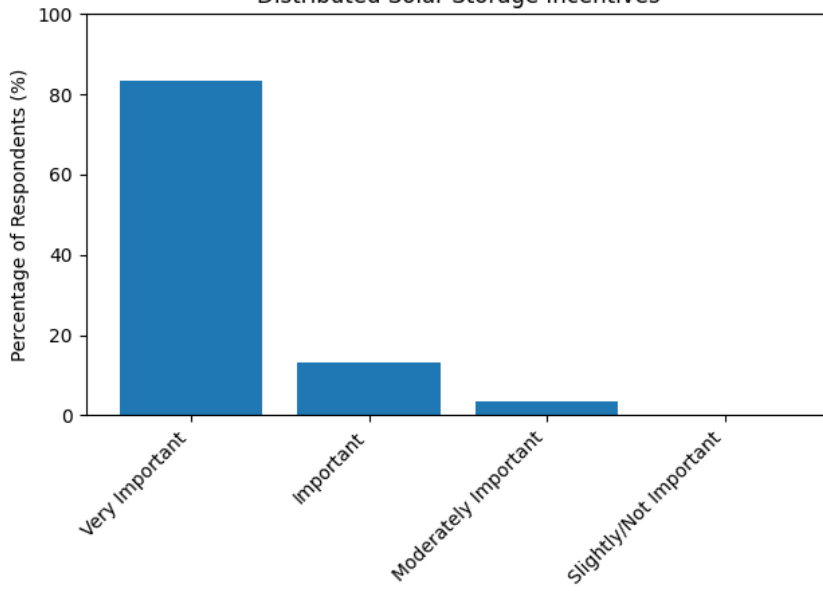
Transmission Investment



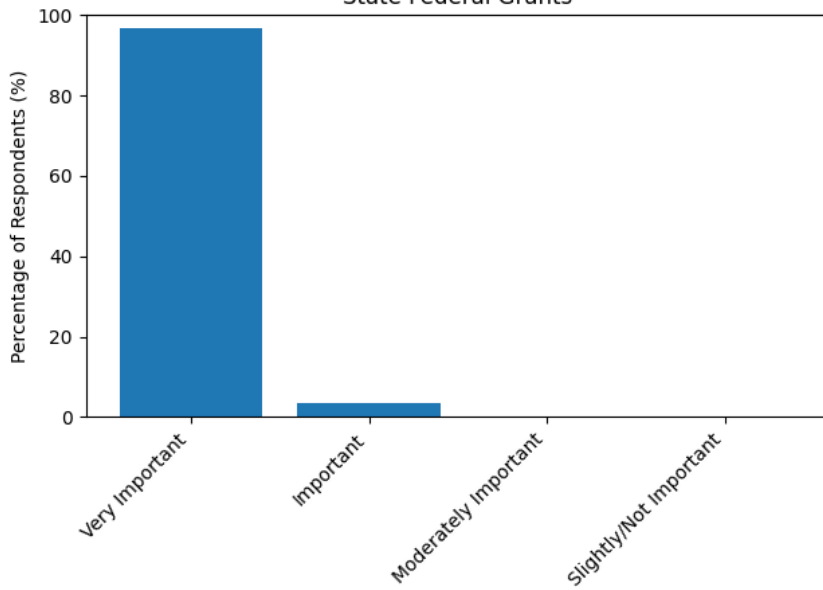
Affordable Electricity Protections



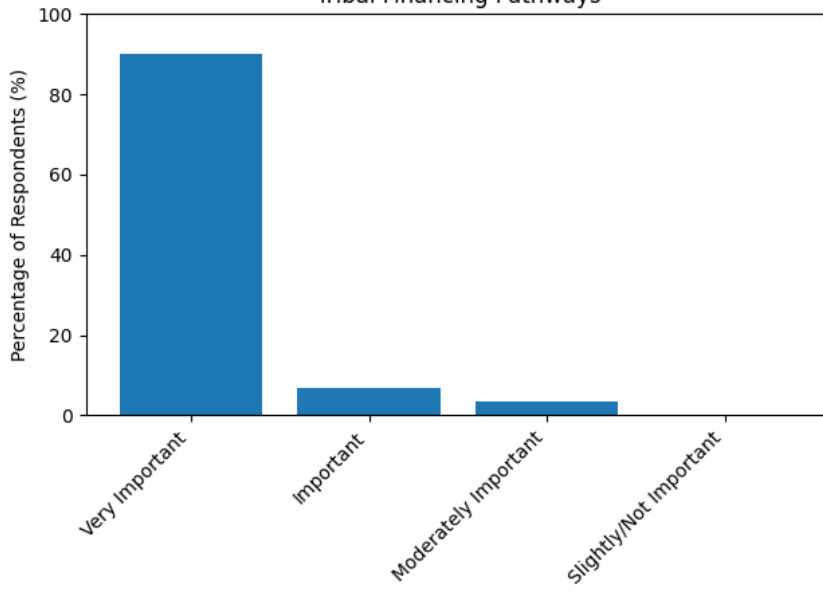
Distributed Solar Storage Incentives



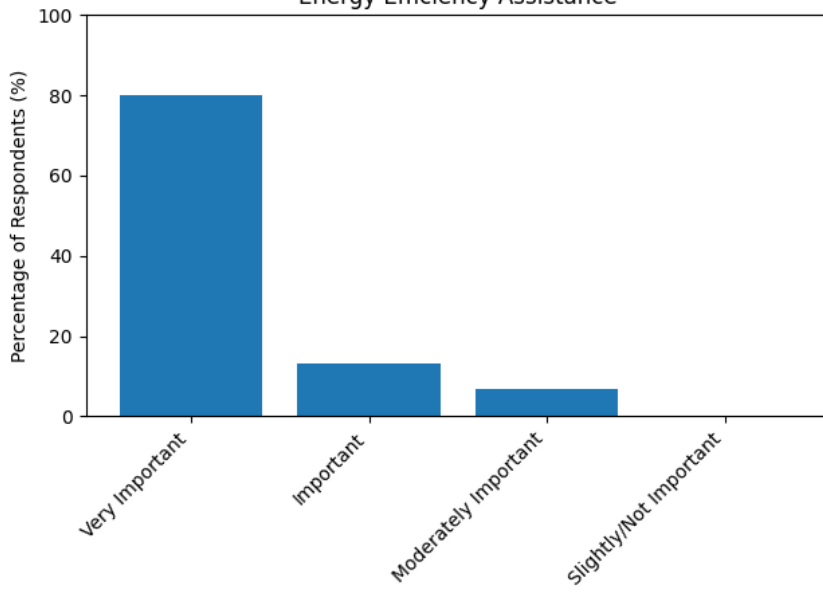
State Federal Grants



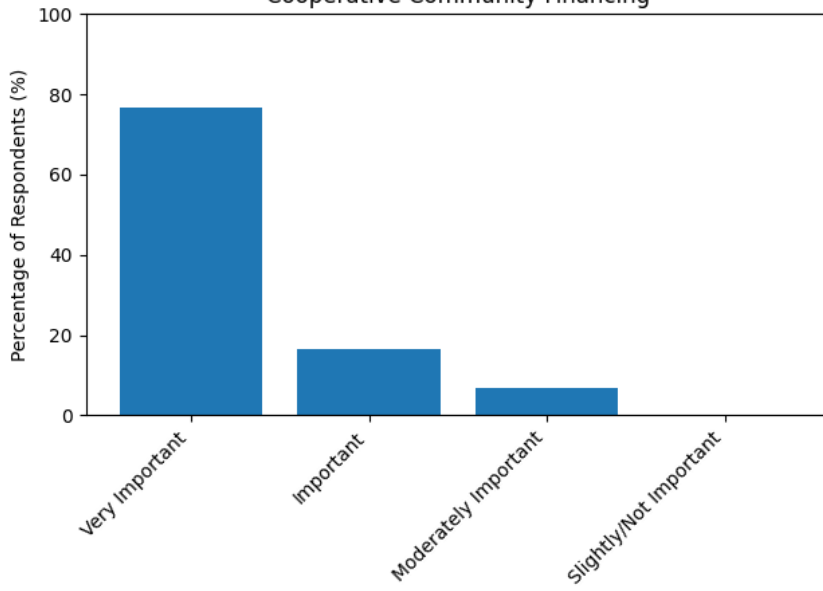
Tribal Financing Pathways



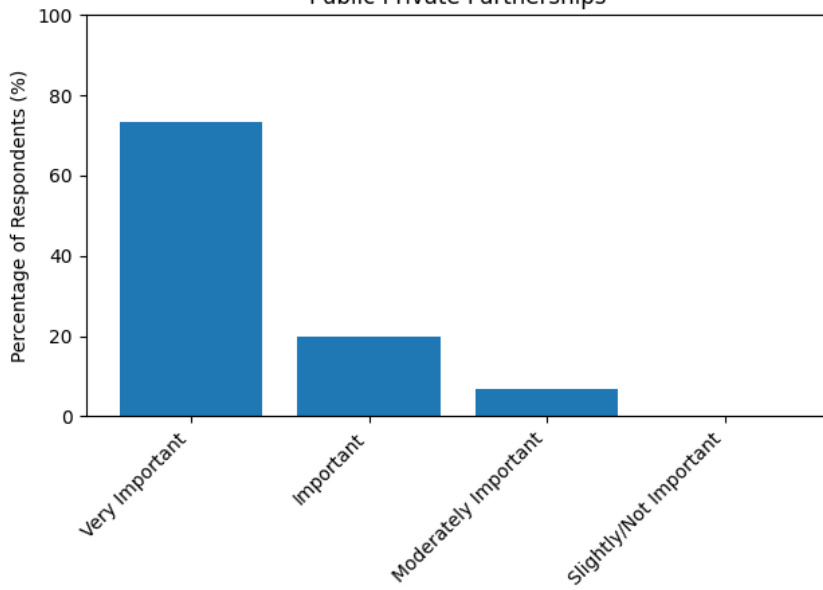
Energy Efficiency Assistance



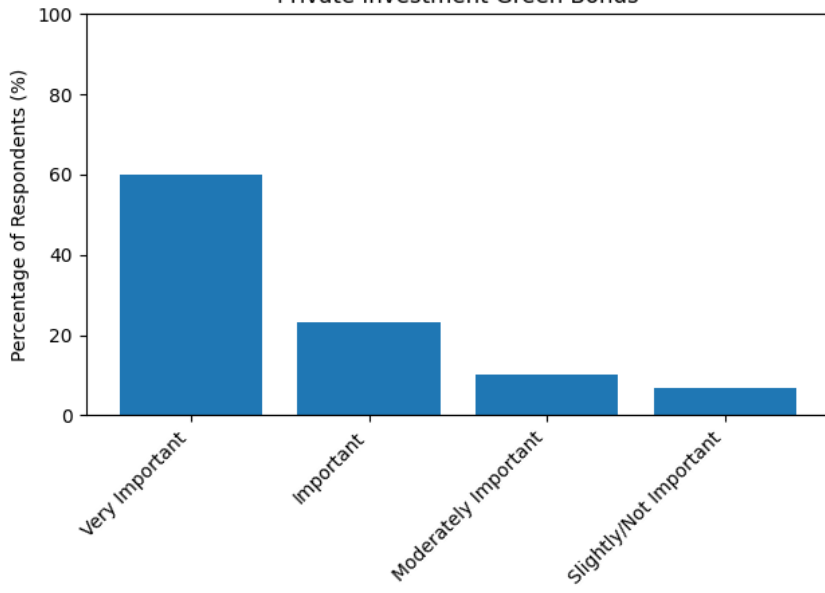
Cooperative Community Financing



Public Private Partnerships



Private Investment Green Bonds



APPENDIX B

- **The New Mexico Workforce Solutions Department** (NMDWS, <https://www.dws.state.nm.us/en-us/>) is engaged in a variety of workforce initiatives including the following:
 - **The Department helps New Mexico veterans** by giving tailored support for disabled and special-emphasis veterans, including Individual Employment Plans, in-depth assessments, and career coaching. The Department also works directly with employers to create job opportunities, organize job fairs, and facilitate job search workshops and provides job search assistance such as access to tools and workshops for veterans.
 - The **BeProud** program takes a Mobile Workshop experience to schools and community centers across the state as the largest – and coolest – mobile tour supporting workforce development. Be Pro Be Proud delivers a ground-breaking set of resources to help students explore, plan, and launch careers in today’s technical roles. Students discover which skilled professions spark their interests as they dig, drive, and weld using custom developed, highly-interactive Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) simulators. <https://www.dws.state.nm.us/en-us/BeProBeProud>.
 - The **Community Benefit Fund** (CBF) invests \$25 million (part of a larger \$340M initiative) between 2026–2028 to train workers for clean energy jobs, modernize the electrical grid, and support industries that mitigate climate change. It focuses on economic transition, offering training for non-extractive industries and funding youth programs. <https://www.dws.state.nm.us/en-us/Community-Benefit-Fund>.
 - NMDWS launched the **Rural P20 initiative**, aimed at creating a seamless education-to-career pipeline from preschool through age 20. Funded by a \$400,000 legislative grant, this 18-month project focuses on rural school districts to align education with regional workforce needs, particularly in high-demand fields like STEM and aerospace. <https://www.dws.state.nm.us/News/Latest-News/new-mexico-launches-first-preschool-to-workforce-initiative-through-rural-education-workforce-collaborative>.
 - NMDWS offers the **Integrated Education & Training (IET) program** is a structured program where adult learners participate in contextualized adult education or literacy services at the same time as they are completing workforce training and workforce preparation activities aligned to a specific career or job goal. www.hed.nm.gov/students-parents/adult_education/for-adult-students-and-families/workforce-preparation-career-pathways.
- The **Governor issued an Executive Order** to enable the state to leverage billions of federal and state dollars to ensure that New Mexico’s workforce is prepared for the work of modernizing transportation, telecommunications, water, and energy systems. <https://www.governor.state.nm.us/2024/09/23/governor-issues-executive-order-expanding-and-investing-in-climate-ready-and-infrastructure-workforce-for-new-mexico/>
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- The **New Mexico Higher Education Department** administers the Opportunity Scholarship which provides full tuition and fees for New Mexico residents attending New Mexico public colleges and universities who are pursuing credit-bearing career training certificates, associate’s degrees and bachelor’s degrees. See <https://hed.nm.gov/free-college-for-new-mexico>.
- **New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department’s** Energy Conservation and Management Division offers a variety of incentives for renewable energy, clean transportation and energy efficiency upgrades. See <https://www.emnrd.nm.gov/ecmd/tax-credit-programs/>.
- **New Mexico Economic Development Department** Local Economic Development Acts empowers communities to embark on economic development projects tailored to their LOCAL needs. In essence, LEDA is used to enter into a “public private partnership” for an economic benefit. <https://edd.newmexico.gov/community-development/local-economic-development-act/>.

- **Tribal Energy Alternatives** supports tribal nations in their pursuit of energy sovereignty through solar energy solutions, hands-on training, and community empowerment, ensuring sustainable development and long-term environmental health. The organization's program provides wraparound services for tribes seeking energy solutions, filling gaps where state support falls short. The program hired about 75% of installation crew from local areas and focuses on five pillars: engineering, procurement, construction, workforce development, and policy advocacy. See <https://tribalalternatives.org/>.