Minority Communities, The Energy Economy & Environmental Justice: The Need For An Energy Inclusion Initiative

Energy inclusion is essential to environmental justice and economic equity in marginalized communities

# **PREPARED BY:**



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# Minority Communities, The Energy Economy and Environmental Justice: The Need For An Energy Inclusion Initiative

### **Case Study and Action Plan**

A Report by the Financial Services Innovation Coalition (FSIC)

#### **Abstract**

The Financial Services Innovation Coalition (FSIC) presents this report highlighting the intersection of environmental justice and economic inclusion in the U.S. energy sector, where minority communities face disproportionate environmental harm and systemic economic exclusion. Black Americans hold a small percentage of energy jobs and own only 2.7% of energy-related businesses despite bearing the brunt of pollution, hazardous waste exposure, and climate change impacts. Our research, including interviews and surveys, has shown very little knowledge or exposure to the energy space among minority leaders and stakeholders. In fact, most respondents had no idea how energy is produced or that natural gas was even a part of the electricity production process.

While federal and state environmental justice initiatives allocate billions of dollars to mitigate these harms, much of the funding fails to directly benefit affected communities through job creation, business opportunities, or workforce development. FSIC's research across five states reveals a critical gap in energy education and community engagement, leaving minority populations without the knowledge or resources to advocate for equitable energy policies or economic participation. To address this, FSIC proposes an Energy Inclusion Initiative that integrates environmental justice with workforce training, community education, and policy advocacy. By ensuring that minority communities gain access to education and exposure to energy-related careers, business ownership, decision-making roles, and the energy industry's impact in general, FSIC seeks to advance economic empowerment and environmental justice, fostering a more equitable and sustainable energy future.

# Part 1

#### I. Introduction

Energy production is a cornerstone of modern society, driving economic growth, powering homes and industries, and enabling technological advancement. However, the processes involved in energy generation—from natural gas extraction to renewable energy installations, often have significant environmental, economic, and social impacts.

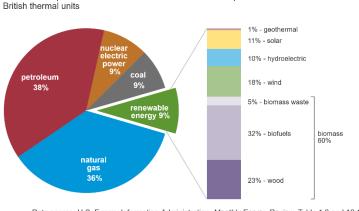




### U.S. primary energy consumption by energy source, 2023

total = 8.24 quadrillion British thermal units

total = 93.59 quadrillion



Data source: U.S. Energy Information Administration, Monthly Energy Review, Table 1.3 and 10.1, April 2024, preliminary data

Note: Sum of components may not equal 100% because of independent rounding.

Minority communities have historically been excluded from discussions about energy policy. As a result, they are disproportionately affected by its negative consequences while missing opportunities to benefit from its wealth-building opportunities through investment, ownership, and employment. An enormous body of evidence documents that low-income and/or minority communities are disproportionately exposed to various sources of air and water pollution, such as refineries, congested highways, and/or hazardous waste or superfund sites (Brookings).

Environmental justice should be understood as more than just reducing pollution or mitigating harm. It encompasses equitable access to resources, participation in decision-making processes, and sharing the benefits of a clean energy future. Traditional views on environmental justice often focus narrowly on addressing environmental harm in minority and low-income communities, neglecting the broader systemic inequities that perpetuate these challenges. The current energy ecosystem presents both opportunities and risks. While the transition to renewable energy should offer economic and environmental benefits, the systemic exclusion throughout the energy sector has left minority communities out of the economic benefits of even this industry.

Additionally, the focus on renewable energy has exacerbated the lack of inclusion in the fossil fuel industry. For instance, while there are some examples of a movement to include Black Americans in the growing solar energy industry, in many communities, they are not full participants and are often left out of any economic benefits.

While well-intentioned, the education process is not coupled with adequate exposure to opportunities in the traditional energy sector.

- **Energy Production's Significance**: Energy production is fundamental to modern society, driving economic growth and technological advancement. However, the processes involved, such as natural gas extraction and renewable energy installations, often have significant environmental and social impacts (<u>University of Colorado Boulder</u>).
- **Exclusion of Minority Communities**: Historically, minority communities have been excluded from energy policy discussions, leading to disproportionate exposure to environmental hazards. For instance, because of limited economic opportunities, these communities often reside near hazardous waste facilities, facing more significant health risks than average. They are also frequently unaware of mitigation options and opportunities to influence the development. (Energy.gov).
- **Broadening Environmental Justice**: Modern Environmental justice encompasses equitable access to resources, participation in decision-making, and sharing the benefits of an energy future. This conversation often focuses heavily on alternative energy sources,



such as solar and wind, with little discussion of natural gas or other fossil fuel sources. Traditional views often focus narrowly on addressing environmental harm in minority and low-income communities, neglecting broader systemic issues (<u>Initiative for Energy Justice</u>).

#### II. Remedies for Environmental Issues in Underserved Communities

Several programs and initiatives, mainly government-sponsored, aim to assist communities disproportionately affected by environmental injustices, the adverse effects of energy production, pollution, or climate change. Their goal, in general, is to help the underserved communities hardest hit by these harmful effects. These programs and organizations promote research, policy, and programs to help affected populations recover from the damage and health issues they are experiencing. However, as noted in the examples below, few programs operate directly in the communities in question. Also, few resources are distributed to individuals with health issues, property damage, or the direct effects of pollution in their neighborhoods and environment. Here are some examples of such programs:

- EPA's Environmental and Climate Justice Grants Program (epa.gov)
- NAACP's Environmental and Climate Justice Program (naacp.org)
- Equitable and Just Climate Platform (<u>ajustclimate.org</u>)
- Earthjustice's Clean Energy Program (earthjustice.org)
- Inflation Reduction Act's Environmental Justice Provisions (en.wikipedia.org)
- Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (<u>EPA</u>)
- Community-Based Clean Energy Training Programs (apnews.com)

These programs represent a range of efforts to mitigate environmental injustices, and their stated goal is to support communities most affected by the negative consequences of energy production, pollution, and climate change. Yet, despite the billions of dollars allocated to mitigate the damage caused by energy production in minority communities, much of this funding has not directly benefited the individuals most affected. Programs like the **Community Change Grants Program**, which allocated \$1.6 billion in 2024 to reduce pollution and enhance climate resilience, often fund research, administrative costs, and policy initiatives rather than direct relief for residents experiencing environmental harm (EPA).

Similarly, the \$3 billion Climate and Environmental Justice Block Grants under the Inflation Reduction Act were intended to assist disadvantaged communities, yet much of the funding has gone to bureaucratic processes rather than on-the-ground environmental improvements (NWF). For example, according to the grant guidelines, the following is an eligible use: "Facilitating engagement of disadvantaged communities in state and federal public processes, including facilitating such engagement in advisory groups, workshops, and rulemakings."

Furthermore, while the **Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Grantmaking Program** provided **\$48 million** (EPA) for community-based organizations and tribal governments to reduce pollution, reports indicate that many local projects remain underfunded, leaving residents exposed to harmful pollutants (Environmental Protection Network). These funding efforts often fail to deliver measurable improvements in air and water quality, public health, or community resilience, meaning the same environmental hazards persist. Many residents in these communities continue to suffer from disproportionately high rates of respiratory disease, unsafe drinking water, and



exposure to toxic waste, underscoring the need for more direct and effective interventions (<u>WHO</u>)(<u>ScienceDirect</u>).

### III. Energy Production and Environmental Justice

Natural gas is currently the largest source of electricity generation in the United States, accounting for nearly 40% of the total energy mix (<u>U.S. EIA</u>). Renewable energy sources, including wind and solar, have grown significantly in recent years but still comprise a smaller portion of electricity production. This reliance on natural gas poses challenges for achieving environmental justice, as its extraction and use disproportionately impact minority communities located near production sites.

Despite its importance, many minority communities lack awareness or understanding of energy production processes and their implications. This knowledge gap limits their ability to advocate for policies that address inequities in the energy sector. Efforts to increase education and engagement in these communities are essential for fostering informed participation in energy-related decisions.

- **Natural Gas vs. Other Sources**: Natural gas is currently the largest source of electricity generation in the United States, accounting for nearly 40% of the total energy mix. Renewable energy sources, including wind and solar, have grown significantly in recent years but still make up a smaller portion of electricity production (Energy.gov).
- **Understanding Among Minority Communities**: Despite its importance, many minority communities lack awareness or understanding of energy production processes and their implications. This knowledge gap limits their ability to advocate for policies that address inequities in the energy sector (<a href="Heriot-Watt Research Portal">Heriot-Watt Research Portal</a>).

# IV. Case Study

FSIC conducted a case study through focus groups and interviews with community leaders and constituents in Maryland (MD), Virginia (VA), North Carolina (NC), South Carolina (SC), and Georgia (GA). The objective was to assess whether organizations or government bodies had engaged these communities in energy education or discussions on Environmental Justice (EJ).

Our findings revealed a significant gap in EJ and fossil fuel education. Community members reported that no one had approached them to discuss energy and its impact on their communities. However, they expressed a strong interest in learning more about these issues. Many community members cited concerns about the affordability of energy, the health implications of energy production, and the lack of accessible career pathways in the industry. They were particularly interested in how energy policies impact their everyday lives and what opportunities exist for them to be part of the broader energy discussion.



Several community leaders indicated that historically, most energy-related conversations in their communities have centered around clean energy initiatives, such as solar and wind power, without acknowledging the continued reliance on fossil fuels. While clean energy discussions are critical, these communities felt left out of the broader energy landscape, particularly concerning career and



economic development opportunities within the fossil fuel industry. Without adequate information, community members felt they were missing key insights that could help them advocate for better energy policies and economic benefits in their regions.

FSIC believes that poor and minority communities should be introduced to the fossil fuel industry, educated on its benefits and necessary improvements from an EJ perspective, and made aware of career opportunities in the sector. The discourse on energy education predominantly focuses on clean energy solutions, such as solar power, often overlooking traditional energy production as a viable career pathway. Since each state has its own EJ office, FSIC aims to collaborate with these offices to inform them about local EJ and energy issues and solutions.

To address this gap, FSIC plans to provide targeted educational programming that covers the entire energy spectrum, including traditional and clean energy sources. Through partnerships with community leaders and energy professionals, FSIC will facilitate discussions on energy policies, workforce development, and EJ-related concerns. The goal is to empower these communities with the knowledge and tools to make informed decisions about energy consumption, policy advocacy, and workforce participation.

FSIC also recognizes that environmental and energy education must be culturally and regionally relevant. Each of the five states studied has unique environmental challenges and energy infrastructures. By tailoring educational programs to the specific needs of each state, FSIC can ensure that the information provided is applicable and actionable. In addition, FSIC will work with community organizations to develop grassroots engagement strategies, leveraging trusted local voices to build awareness and participation.

Through continued engagement, FSIC hopes to shift the narrative surrounding fossil fuels and environmental justice, ensuring that marginalized communities are equipped to take advantage of the opportunities available within the energy sector. This effort will enhance knowledge and create pathways for economic growth, workforce readiness, and more equitable energy policies.

#### V. Workforce

Most energy workforce program ideas are focused on clean energy and rarely include traditional or fossil fuel industry careers. While a growing clean energy industry does present some job opportunities, this is the wrong approach for the current and next generation. Fossil fuels account for around 60% of the energy production in the U.S., making it the industry with the largest pool of career opportunities. Further, the clean energy sector, particularly solar and wind energy, has been promoted as a promising avenue for workforce opportunities for marginalized communities. However, these efforts often fail to address systemic barriers that limit access to these jobs. In coal mining and oil and gas extraction specifically, Black or African American workers account for a respective 0.9 and 6.8 percent of the labor force. Minority workers remain underrepresented in the renewable and traditional energy workforce, highlighting the need for targeted policies to ensure equitable participation (NASEO).

Broader workforce development programs, including renewable and traditional energy industries, are critical for addressing these disparities. Initiatives such as those outlined in Section VI provide models for training and inclusion, offering pathways to stable, well-paying jobs that benefit both individuals and their communities. Through FSIC's independent research, we found via our Electrical Lineworker Training Program that the traditional energy economy held great promise for minority economic inclusion.



#### VI. Recommendations for Inclusion Activities

# A. Policy and Program Ideas

Working with state legislatures and industry leaders to create pilot programs can provide marginalized communities with training for energy-related jobs and a wide range of career opportunities beyond their local areas. These programs can address systemic inequities by equipping individuals with the skills needed for sustainable employment (Climate Break).

### **B. Community Outreach**

Engaging directly with communities through outreach programs is essential for building trust and ensuring their concerns and perspectives are included in policy development. Transparent communication and active participation are key to creating equitable solutions (Goldman Environmental Prize).

#### C. Local Government Outreach

Collaboration with state and local governments is crucial for implementing effective environmental justice initiatives. Policymakers at these levels can allocate resources, support workforce development, and enact regulations prioritizing marginalized communities' needs, ensuring that they share in the benefits of a clean energy transition (American Bar Association).





# Part II

## **FSIC Recommendation for Energy Education Program**

How do we get more minorities included in the energy economy? What are the gaps? Why don't minorities know about the industry? How do we create a process to address these issues?

### I. Analysis of Energy Education in Select Communities

FSIC's success in its approach to energy education is rooted in its extensive experience, deep understanding of marginalized communities, and a broad network of trusted community leaders and elected officials. With over a decade of experience, FSIC has demonstrated its ability to educate and engage underserved populations effectively. The organization's approach integrates workforce development, energy policy education, and career opportunities, ensuring historically excluded communities can access the information and resources they need.

## II. FSIC Energy Education (Since 2017)



FSIC has worked on energy inclusion initiatives for over nine years, primarily in Halifax County, NC, Selma, AL, and various communities in Florida. These efforts have included direct engagement with community members, workforce training programs, and collaborative efforts with local leaders to raise awareness about energy policies and opportunities.

Dream Creators Workforce Program: FSIC designed and implemented this initiative, which provides electrical utility lineworker training and support. The program focuses on equipping individuals with the technical skills required for careers in the energy sector while also addressing broader economic disparities by connecting participants to job opportunities.

FSIC has partnered with fossil fuel energy organizations to bring education and awareness to marginalized communities. Through these partnerships, FSIC has worked to dispel misconceptions about energy production, highlight career pathways within the sector, and foster conversations around environmental responsibility.

The organization has organized numerous educational events, developing presentations that cater to diverse audiences. By working with community partners, FSIC ensures that these events are well-attended

and impactful, drawing engagement from local leaders, job seekers, and policymakers.

Workforce Development and Career Pathways: One of FSIC's key objectives has been to provide job seekers with direct access to industry professionals. At FSIC-hosted

FSIC AIOF Dream Creators Workforce Program Graduates 2023



events, attendees have had the opportunity to engage with energy sector representatives, ask questions about career prospects, and gain insights into training requirements for various roles.

# **III. Expansion of Energy Education Initiatives**



FSIC Community Event on Energy Education

Recognizing the ongoing need for energy education, FSIC has continued to refine and expand its approach. Some of the organization's efforts include:

Bridging the Gap in Energy Awareness: FSIC's programs introduce participants to career opportunities and focus on how energy decisions impact their daily lives. These initiatives cover household energy efficiency, the role of different energy sources in power generation, and the environmental implications of energy production.

Policy Advocacy and Community Involvement: FSIC has actively engaged in conversations around energy policy, advocating for greater inclusion of marginalized communities in decision-making processes. Through its outreach, FSIC has encouraged community members to participate in discussions around regulatory changes, sustainability efforts, and workforce investment in the energy sector.

Building Sustainable Partnerships: To enhance its programming, FSIC has cultivated partnerships with local governments, academic institutions, and energy organizations. These collaborations have facilitated the development of specialized training modules, expanded access to scholarships and apprenticeships, and provided funding for community-driven initiatives.

FSIC's commitment to energy education is grounded in the belief that knowledge empowers communities. By providing structured, accessible, and comprehensive educational programs, FSIC aims to ensure that marginalized populations are not left behind in the evolving energy landscape. The organization's ongoing efforts continue to break barriers, creating new opportunities for economic mobility and environmental advocacy within historically underserved communities.

#### **IV. Action Plan**

Leveraging its experience, FSIC proposes the following approach to energy education in marginalized communities.

## A. Community Engagement and Event Planning

- Establish and strengthen relationships with MD, VA, NC, SC, and GA community leaders to facilitate event organization
- Revise current event materials to include an Energy Industry Education Module that provides a comprehensive overview of traditional and renewable energy sources.
- Develop accessible energy education handouts and marketing materials to ensure engagement across various literacy levels.



- Incorporate multi-subject content to maximize community engagement. Each event will feature modules on:
  - Health Equity
  - Financial Literacy
  - o Digital Equity
  - o Environmental Justice (EJ), including Energy Industry Education
- The EJ module will provide:
  - A comprehensive overview of Environmental Justice and its relevance to marginalized communities.
  - o Identification of prevalent environmental challenges and potential solutions.
  - o Insights into the continued role of fossil fuels in energy production, with natural gas currently generating 40% of U.S. electricity.

# **B.** Educational Event Implementation

FSIC will conduct four events in each state, with some communities receiving multiple visits to reinforce learning and foster deeper engagement. The recommended locations are as follows:

### South Carolina (SC)

- Marion County, SC St. James Learning Center
- Atlantic Beach, SC Facility TBD
- Additional location TBD

### North Carolina (NC)

- Halifax County, NC Oak Grove Baptist Church
- Greensboro, NC Facility TBD
- Additional location TBD

#### Virginia (VA)

- Richmond, VA Facility TBD
  - Community Group 1
- Richmond, VA Facility TBD
  - o Community Group 2
- Additional location TBD

### Maryland (MD)

- Prince George's County, MD Facility TBD
- Beltsville or Brentwood, MD Facility TBD
- Additional location TBD

#### Georgia (GA)

- Atlanta, GA Facility TBD
- Brunswick, GA Facility TBD
- Additional location TBD

FSIC has received commitments from community leaders to participate in this program in most of the communities listed above. We have active Memorandums of Understanding, with half of the community organizations in those locations.



### V. Conclusion

Through this initiative, FSIC aims to bridge the energy education gap in communities it supports and other marginalized communities, ensuring that these populations are informed about the role of fossil fuels, environmental justice, and career opportunities in the energy industry. By engaging community leaders and leveraging our proven educational model, FSIC seeks to empower historically underserved communities with the knowledge and resources they need to advocate for sustainable and equitable energy solutions.





#### **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment #1

Meeting summary for Environmental Justice Interview 01/09/2025

Interviewer: Kevin Kimble, CEO, FSIC

Interviewee: Kent Williams, State Senator, State of South Carolina

### Quick recap

The discussion focused on minority communities' lack of engagement in energy conversations, the potential for growth in South Carolina, and the need for more African Americans to be involved in the energy industry. Lastly, they touched on the challenges faced by Santee Cooper, the potential for private partnerships, and the importance of minority participation in energy conversations.

## **Next steps**

- Kevin to follow up with Senator Williams on connecting with existing groups in South Carolina that discuss energy and workforce issues.
- Senator Williams will review and consider co-sponsoring Senator Tom Davis's bill on allowing Santee Cooper to partner with private entities for the Jenkinsville nuclear power plant site.
- Kevin to continue research on engaging African Americans in energy conversations and industry participation in South Carolina.
- Senator Williams will explore ways to ensure adequate minority participation in upcoming energy discussions and decisions in South Carolina.
- Kevin to stay informed about South Carolina's legislative priorities regarding energy, particularly concerning data centers and grid capacity.

# **Audio Recording and AI Note-Taker Summary**

Kevin and Brady discussed the need for an audio recording of their conversation with Senator Williams, which would be typed up for documentation purposes. Kevin was on the road and had already had the discussion with Senator Williams but needed it recorded for future reference. Brady agreed to use an AI note-taker to transcribe the conversation and send it to Kevin via email.

## **Engaging Minority Communities in Energy**

Kevin and Senator Williams discussed the lack of engagement of minority communities in energy conversations and the potential for growth in South Carolina. Senator Williams mentioned that energy is a top priority in the current legislative session due to the state's rapid growth. Kevin suggested engaging with the State Environmental Justice Office, which Senator Williams had not previously done. They also discussed the need for more African Americans to be involved in the energy industry, with Senator Williams emphasizing the importance of having a seat at the decision-making table. They also touched on the topic of natural gas development, with Senator Williams mentioning a proposed natural gas energy plant in the low country.

# Reviving Jenkinsville Nuclear Power Plant

Senator Williams discussed the challenges faced by Santee Cooper, a state-owned institution, and the potential for private partnerships to revive the Jenkinsville nuclear power plant. He expressed concerns about the gas supply and Dominion Energy's role in the energy sector. Senator Williams also emphasized the importance of minority participation in energy conversations and the need to address energy issues to prevent data centers from locating in South Carolina. Kevin and Brady agreed to engage more in the energy conversation and seek Senator Williams's assistance in connecting the dots.



Attachment #2 Community Leaders and Members – first round of interviews

Kent Williams State Senator State of South Carolina

Thomas Houston Pastor Eastside Global Ministries Atlanta, GA

Jennifer Martin Founder Shattered Ceilings Prince George's County, MD

Josephine Mourning President Southern Christian Leadership Conference Prince George's County (MD) Chapter

Sonji Rollins Tucker Founder and Managing Director SRT Wealth Design Group, LLC

Yvonne Holley Former State of NC Representative Lt. Governor Candidate State of North Carolina

Vivienne Pierce McDaniel, DNP, MSN, RN Interim Executive Director NBNA Health Policy Committee Vice-Chair NBNA Collaborative Mentorship Program Mentor CVCBNA Mini Nurse Academy Program Coordinator/Ambassador

Doree A. Henry Chief of Staff State Senator Donzella James Former Chief of Staff GA Legislative Black Caucus

Attachment #3 **State Environmental Justice Offices** 



Maryland - <a href="https://mde.maryland.gov/Environmental\_Justice/Pages/Landing%20Page.aspx">https://mde.maryland.gov/Environmental\_Justice/Pages/Landing%20Page.aspx</a>

Virginia - <a href="https://www.deq.virginia.gov/our-programs/environmental-justice">https://www.deq.virginia.gov/our-programs/environmental-justice</a>

North Carolina - <a href="https://www.deq.nc.gov/outreach-education/environmental-justice">https://www.deq.nc.gov/outreach-education/environmental-justice</a>

South Carolina - <a href="https://des.sc.gov/community/environmental-justice">https://des.sc.gov/community/environmental-justice</a>

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### Attachment #4

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 $\frac{climate\#:\sim:text=\%E2\%80\%9CAs\%20part\%20of\%20the\%20President\%27s\%20Justice40\%20Initiative\%2C, marginalized\%20by\%20underinvestment\%20and\%20overburdened\%20by\%20pollution.$ 

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