



Fighting for Energy Justice in Minnesota

A community-grounded approach in Xcel Energy’s rate case tackles persistent, structural injustices in the energy system.

In Minnesota, a coalition of cooperative, community-based, and advocacy organizations is fighting Xcel’s request to hike rates by nearly a half billion dollars through a long-overdue lens: Energy Justice. Through this community-grounded approach, Community Power, Cooperative Energy Futures, Minnesota Interfaith Power & Light, and Vote Solar – all members of the Minneapolis-based Just Solar Coalition – not only question how Xcel’s petition would unduly burden people who can’t afford it. Represented by the Environmental Law & Policy Center, they also ask the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission to ensure equitable access to the financial and ownership benefits of clean energy technologies that would build community wealth and decision-making power, transforming the narrative that communities are just passive purchasers of power. Minnesota law requires that the commission set “just and reasonable” rates. How can rates be “just and reasonable” if they ignore and deepen persistent, structural injustices in the energy system?

What is Energy Justice?

Energy Justice seeks to remediate the social, economic, and health burdens on the frontline communities disproportionately harmed by and/or excluded from the energy system. It’s about reimagining how the energy system works to make power more affordable and resilient, and allow those most impacted to be central decision-makers and share equitably in its benefits.



Who is the JSC?

[The Just Solar Coalition](#) is a diverse group of community, industry, and environmental justice leaders who embrace a vision of 100% access to the benefits of clean energy. As a group, they support a transition to a green energy economy that not only includes everyone but also helps to close the employment gap, improves the natural world, and creates a new story about the community’s role in the energy system.

What is the Minnesota Paradox?

In the words of University of Minnesota Professor Samuel L. Myers, “African Americans are worse off in Minnesota than they are in virtually every other state in the nation. The simultaneous existence of Minnesota as the best state to live in, but the worst state to live in for Blacks, is the crux of ‘The Minnesota Paradox.’” This disparity is entrenched in the energy system. While Minnesotans overall have lower energy insecurity rates than the national average, Black Minnesotans are more likely to have both higher energy and pollution burden, and less access to the cost-saving and wealth-building energy programs to avoid those burdens.

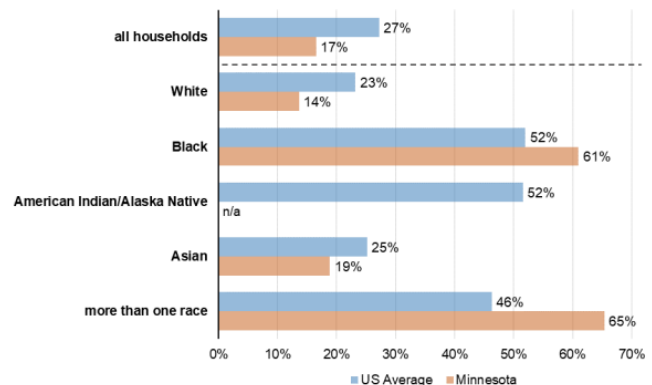


Figure 3. Percent of households in the U.S. and in Minnesota that reported some form of energy insecurity in the U.S. Energy Information Administration’s Residential Energy

How Can Localized Energy Promote Energy Justice?

A more decentralized energy system, with higher levels of distributed energy resources (often called “DERs”), is a necessary part of a more equitable and just industry. DERs alone are not a panacea for the deeply inequitable American economic system or for climate change, but they are a core and absolutely critical foundation for transforming both. Since their inception as monopolies in the early 20th century, utilities have functioned as a one-way delivery service for electricity. This profitable 20th-century utility monopoly thinking has continued to guide electric utility policy, even as we move away from fossil fuel power plants and towards highly modular technologies like small-scale renewables, storage, and energy management systems.



DERs disrupt the assumption of centralized decision-making, infrastructure, and wealth by enabling customers and communities to not only play host to energy assets but also actively participate and own the supply of electricity. The term “DERs” covers a vast and continually evolving array of technologies, including energy efficiency measures, rooftop solar panels, home batteries, electric transportation, smart buildings, and multi-customer microgrids. These systems allow customers to have more control over how they obtain and use their energy. DER ownership – when designed for access, not for a new gold-rush of venture capitalists alone – gives low-income households, communities of color, and other historically burdened communities opportunities to build local wealth and jobs in a way that billion-dollar, centralized infrastructure never did or can.

“It’s hard to understand why it’s reasonable or just for the utility to earn a higher return on its investments when already making record profits on the backs of community members.”

North Minneapolis activist & organizer Kristel Porter



Want to learn more?

Scan this code or visit elpc.org/energyjustice to find additional information about the Just Solar Coalition’s efforts, including expert testimony, legal briefs, and relevant articles.