



Tribal Strategic Energy Planning Toolkit

A Handbook for Tribal Energy Sovereignty & Community Resilience

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Introduction & Purpose

This handbook is designed to help tribal governments, energy teams, and community members create Tribal Strategic Energy Plans (TSEPs) that reflect local priorities and cultural values.

A TSEP is a living roadmap for how your community will meet its current and future needs. This toolkit provides a clear, step-by-step process, practical templates and success stories to guide you.

Why develop a Tribal Strategic Energy Plan?

Developing a TSEP supports tribal energy sovereignty and helps communities:

- Lower energy costs for homes, business, and community facilities.
- Improve energy security and reliability.
- Build resilience to natural disasters and climate impacts.
- Create local jobs and training opportunities.
- Strengthen self-determination by deciding how energy is produced, used, and managed.

Guiding Principles

This planning process is built on three guiding principles:

1. Community-Driven: Engage tribal citizens early and often. Community input shapes priorities and builds support.
2. Culturally Relevant: Plans honor local values, traditions, and stewardship practices.
3. Sustainable & Resilient: Plans consider long-term impacts and future generations.

The Tribal Strategic Energy Planning Process



Step 1: Engage Leadership & Community

Form an energy planning team or steering committee with diverse representation- elders, youth, technical staff, cultural leaders, and decision makers.

Gather community input through meetings, surveys, and listening sessions. Building trust and buy-in at this stage is essential for success.

Step 2: Assess Current Conditions

Understand where you are today:

- How much energy does the community use?
- What does it cost?
- What infrastructure exists?
- What are the pain points (e.g., outages, high bills)?

Use utility bills, building audits, and local knowledge to develop a baseline. Consider coordinating with your incumbent utility provider, which can help consolidate meters, usage data, and potentially other system design information that may inform your assessment. Data held by incumbent utilities, such as PSE, is protected from external distribution and is provided only to Tribal members or their authorized representatives.

Step 3: Define Goals & Priorities

Work with the community to set clear goals. Examples include:

- Reduce energy costs by 20% in 5 years.
- Build a community solar project.
- Train local workforce for clean energy jobs.

Draft an energy vision statement that reflects community values.

Step 4: Identify & Evaluate Options

Explore options that fit your community's goals:

- Energy efficiency upgrades (lighting, insulation, weatherization).
- Renewable energy (solar, wind, biomass).
- Microgrids or battery storage for energy resilience.

Identify the level of involvement that your tribe wants to have in the opportunities that you lay out in your goals. For example, does your tribe value financing, designing and deploying a renewable energy project to be owned and operated by the tribe, or is this a project that you would like a partner to join you in? Compare options using cost-benefit analysis. Prioritize feasible actions with big impacts.

Step 5: Develop the Plan

Use your goals and options to build a clear, written plan. Include:

- Actions and timelines
- Responsible parties
- Funding opportunities, potential partnership opportunities
- Communication plan for keeping the community updated

There's no one plan that works for all tribes, but there are elements of a successful and measurable plan that can help ensure that outcomes are clear and objectives are achievable. So, consider working with potential partners such as incumbent utilities, government agencies, and non-government support services while you draft your plan to leverage the expertise of others and minimize redundancies.

Step 6: Implement & Monitor

Put the plan into action in phases if needed. PSE programs (energy efficiency, renewable incentives, and technical help) are tools that can be used to advance your energy goals, and they can fit into work supported by public funding opportunities or (in many cases) they can be leveraged as standalone opportunities that support your goals.

Monitor progress with clear indicators (cost-savings, jobs created, emissions reduced). Again, tribes can leverage the resources at PSE and other project partners to help with data and reporting to show changes over time. Celebrate milestones and update the plan regularly.

Case Studies & Examples

Nooksack Indian Tribe- Energy Audits & Full LED Conversions

The Nooksack Indian Tribe partnered with PSE to complete energy audits on five tribal buildings and joined the no-cost LED conversion program for all commercial facilities. Every bulb across all Nooksack-owned commercial buildings was replaced with efficient LEDs.

- \$110,000 saved in equipment and supplies.
- \$21,000+ in annual energy savings.

This project showcases how PSE's efficiency programs can deliver immediate cost relief, long-term savings, and complete coverage across a tribal government's footprint.

Nisqually Tribe Youth & Community Center: Energy Efficiency + Solar Leadership

In 2023, the Nisqually Tribe outfitted its Youth and Community Center with solar panels and partnered with PSE to upgrade nearly 700 indoor lights to energy-efficient LEDs. The LED conversion is expected to save the tribe \$150,000 over the next ten years, but when combined with the solar projects that the Tribe has partnered with PSE, and others, to develop, the projected savings are more than \$100,000 per year in energy costs alone.

This comprehensive approach is helping the Tribe move toward full energy independence, reinforcing their vision to be carbon-neutral, resilient, and aligned with long-term stewardship of their land.

Nisqually Market Solar Project

Through a PSE Solar Grant, the Nisqually Market and gas station installed a 65kW solar system with 146 panels. The project is projected to save \$488,000 over 40 years, while avoiding 61,000 pounds of CO2 emissions annually. This highly visible project demonstrates how renewable energy directly supports both economic and environmental goals.

Other Partnerships:

PSE continues to build relationships across the region, supporting Tribes in identifying opportunities for sustainable, cost-effective, and sovereign energy futures.

Templates & Tools

Include:

- Sample community survey
- Energy data checklist
- TSEP outline
- Example community meeting agenda
- Sample RFP for hiring contractors

Resources & Contacts

For technical assistance, funding opportunities, and more, consider utilizing resources from the following organizations. *Full links to partner and public resources are available on the Tribal Resources Reference page located in the appendix.*

1. [U.S. Department of Energy- Office of Indian Energy](#)
Strategic Energy Planning Handbook - detailed workbook with planning process steps, discussion templates, and worksheets.
2. [DOE Tribal Energy Program](#)
Comprehensive financing, options for requesting technical assistance, training, and educational opportunities for tribal clean energy and efficiency projects.
3. [Building Energy Codes for Tribal Nations Hub](#)
DOE-supported resources offering technical assistance, compliance, tools, and code guidance tailored to tribal infrastructure needs.
4. [Spark Northwest/Northwest SEED](#)
 - [Energy Planning](#): Spark NW and NW SEED offer a regionally-specific guidebook for Northwest Indian Tribes. The guidebook offers step-by-step planning and project development tailored to Northwest Tribes.
 - Organization overview with examples of tribal energy partnerships, use of DOE grants, and community-led solar and planning projects.
5. [Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians \(ATNI\)](#)

ATNI Energy Committee provides key gatherings for tribal leaders dedicated to advancing tribal energy sovereignty. The committee oversees regional tribal energy policy, transmission planning, and workshop collaborator.

6. [Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals \(ITEP\)](#)

Assessments & Planning Tools-templates and resources to support tribal climate adaption and resilience planning; adaptable for energy planning.

7. [MTERA Resource Library](#)
Covers clean energy project development, ownership models, legal and planning guidance-across tribal communities, especially in Midwest but broadly relevant.
8. [EPA Tribal Energy Resources](#)
Energy efficiency, renewables, greenhouse gas inventory, and environmental planning tools adapted for tribal governments.
9. [Planning Guide for Tribal Energy Resources](#)

A case-based planning guide presenting full roadmap toward local renewable energy and microgrid implementation.

10. [Energy Transitions Initiative Partnership Project \(ETIPP\)](#)

The ETIPP offers free technical assistance to help remote communities and tribes plan and implement clean energy projects that strengthen energy resilience, reduce costs, and support sovereignty. Assistance is delivered through a network of national labs and regional partners.

11. [Alliance for Tribal Clean Energy](#)

The Alliance provides no-cost technical, finance, and construct utility-scale solar, wind, battery, and microgrid projects. The Alliance also launched the Indigenous Power & light Fund for Energy Sovereignty, targeting \$100 million to cover upfront pre-development costs (studies, permitting, readiness deposits) often excluded from federal grants.

12. [Cascadia Renewables](#)

Pacific Northwest clean energy consulting and development firm specializing in feasibility studies, solar + storage planning, community solar, and project oversight. A technical assistance provider under WA's Solar plus Storage for Resilient Communities Program.

13. [National Renewable Energy Laboratory](#) (NREL)

NREL has a long track record of working with Tribal Nations. They understand the unique governance, sovereignty, and energy challenges that Tribes face, and provide free or low-cost technical support through DOE-funded programs. For TSEP, NRECL helps with baseline assessments, scenario modeling, implementation support, and capacity building.

How These Support Your Work

Partner/Resource	Relevance to TSEP Process
DOE Office of Indian Energy	Free facilitated planning and templates for TSEP design and development
DOE Tribal Energy Program	Funding and technical support for community energy and efficiency programs
ATNI & Spark NW Guides	Region-specific planning tools and community project models in the Northwest
ITEP & EPA Tools	Additional templates and technical support resources to complement TSEP work
MTERA & Sovereignty Guide	Ownership models and planning frameworks for long-term tribal energy independence
Energy Transitions Initiative Partnership Project (ETIPP).	Grant funds, free technical assistance to help tribal communities. Case studies.
Alliance for Tribal Clean Energy	Feasibility studies, engineering/design support, and development of financing structures.
Cascadia Renewables	Technical assistance, feasibility studies, solar + storage planning, community solar, and project oversight.
National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL)	Technical assistance, tools & data, PVWatts Calculator, Tribal Energy Atlas, Training & Capacity Building, Partnership Programs

Puget Sound Energy: Tribal Programs, Resources, and Partnership Opportunities

Puget Sound Energy (PSE) is the largest energy utility in Washington State, serving more than 1.2 million electric customers and over 900,000 natural gas customers. PSE operates within the homelands and ceded territories of numerous tribal nations and has made commitments to strengthen tribal relationships and expand access to clean energy solutions for tribal communities.

Relevance to Tribal Strategic Energy Planning (TSEP)

Integrating PSE into the Tribe's TSEP framework can help highlight shared pathways for implementation and speed analysis necessary for TSEP development. PSE offers access to resources and programs - such as funding, technical support, and efficiency partnership opportunities that complement tribal efforts and help move plans into action. This section demonstrates how tribes can leverage regional utility partnerships – specifically, partnership with PSE for those tribes located within the company's electric and natural gas service area – to realize their strategic energy goals.

- Supports implementation pathways for energy efficiency, renewable energy, and grid modernization. For example, your tribe may have buildings which are ready to participate in PSE's [Solar Grant Program](#), or a planned housing development may be a great candidate for an energy-resilient microgrid backed by incentives from any of [PSE's Flex](#) demand response programs.
- Encourages early utility partnerships, allowing opportunities for the utilities to see alignment of tribal priorities alongside the utility's regional and state energy policy objectives (e.g., Washington's Clean Energy Transformation Act). In some instances, PSE's broader system needs and the tribe's own goals may complement each other in ways that reduce costs and improve performance for you.
- Promotes resource leveraging by combining utility programs and needs with tribal and federal initiatives. PSE programs may offer additional value to projects beyond what state and federal initiatives may support, for example PSE's [Multi-Occupant Solar](#) program which can provide additional solar benefits to tribal members above levels that are traditionally supported by state and federal grants.
- Demonstrates the regional applicability and action-oriented approach of TSEP.
- Positions your organization as a strategic partner in the clean energy transition.

PSE's Tribal Engagement Approach

PSE's Tribal Government Affairs team is focused on building long-term, respectful, and mutually beneficial relationships with tribes. The utility recognizes tribal sovereignty and works to align its planning and investment strategies with the energy priorities and self-determination goals of tribal governments. Consider PSE a partner invested in your success, whatever your goals may be.

Key Programs and Resources Available to Tribes:

Tribal Energy Grant Opportunities

PSE has supported tribal governments through direct funding opportunities for energy planning, renewable energy development, and energy efficiency improvements.

Clean Energy Implementation Plan (CEIP)

PSE's CEIP outlines the utility's path toward meeting Washington's Clean Energy Transformation Act (CETA) requirements. Tribes can engage with the CEIP process to advocate for targeted investments and equitable access to clean energy programs.

Renewable Energy Programs

PSE offers solar incentives, net metering, and green power programs that tribal members and governments can leverage to expand clean energy use.

Energy Efficiency Incentives

[Rebates and incentives](#) are available for both residential, commercial, and tribal buildings to upgrade their appliances and overall energy efficiency. Upgrades include weatherization, efficient appliances, lighting retrofits and more. To find the right approach that supports your goals, PSE offers tailored support through PSE's [Energy Advisors](#).

If your goals lead you to seeking broader solutions to tribally owned administration and services buildings, you may also contact PSE's Utility Energy Services Contracting (UESC) group at (206) 586-7712 to discuss more holistic upgrades to government owned buildings (note this service is only available for federal and tribal government entities).

Technical Support and Capacity Building

PSE staff can provide technical support in areas such as load forecasting, project scoping, and program design that can help you operationalize your goals. In some cases, this may include direct collaboration on grant applications or pilot projects; for others, it may be an opportunity to leverage or develop new programs with PSE to realize your goals.

Partnership Opportunities

PSE is committed to being a trusted partner to Tribal Nations as they advance their own energy sovereignty and resilience goals. While each Nation's path is unique, PSE offers a range of programs, resources, and collaboration opportunities that can support TSEP at every stage from planning to implementation. And if a program that PSE offers does not quite meet the needs of your tribe, we want to know! Feedback from tribes has helped shape a number of PSE programs over the years to be more inclusive and responsive to tribes' needs – for example, our [Multi-Occupant Solar](#) program and our grid modernization initiatives. For those tribes interested in pursuing partnerships to improve grid resiliency and reliability through grid modernization and microgrid solutions, additional opportunities to work directly with PSE's Grid Modernization may be available.

How PSE Can Support TSEP through Partnership & Collaboration

PSE seeks to be more than a utility provider; we strive to be a partner of choice. By collaborating with Tribal Nations, PSE can help bring resources, expertise, and commitment to support Tribal-led visions for energy sovereignty.

- Work alongside Tribal leadership to co-develop and implement energy projects. See [PSE's Utility Energy Services Contracting](#).
- Support Tribal sovereignty by aligning our system operations and program design to meet your self-determination priorities.
- Offer ongoing partnership through listening sessions, technical workshops, and shared planning efforts.
- Programmatic support for residential customers, commercial entities, and administrative building development.
- Support for tribal members wishing to establish state-imposed utility tax exemption status or enroll in bill discount rate programs.
- Co-developing community-scale renewable energy or microgrid projects.
- Participating in grid modernization planning processes.
- Access to engineering, planning, and energy data to inform TSEP efforts.
- Training and knowledge-sharing to support Tribal energy staff.
- Develop MOU/MOA's to jointly create or integrate a project important to you.
- Leveraging data-sharing agreements to support tribal energy planning.

Get Connected

For more information or to initiate a conversation with PSE's Tribal Government Affairs team, email: tribalrelations@pse.com

Closing

A Tribal Strategic Energy Plan (TSEP) is your community's pathway to solidifying and implementing your energy goals. Whether your goals are to foster energy independence, bolster the energy resiliency of your community, or drive economic opportunity through project development, there is a partner willing to join you on your journey. This handbook is here to support you at every step.

At PSE, we are honored to walk along Tribal nations on the path toward energy sovereignty. We recognize that each nation has unique needs, goals, and traditions, and we are committed to listening, learning and supporting Tribal-led solutions. Together, through partnership, innovation, and respect for sovereignty, we can build a resilient and sustainable energy future for all communities.

Tribal Strategic Energy Planning: Tribal Resources Reference Page

Below is a curated list of resources and partner organizations that support tribal communities in developing strategic energy plans. These links include planning guides, funding opportunities, and technical assistance tools.

U.S. Department of Energy – Office of Indian Energy

Strategic Energy Planning Overview: <https://www.energy.gov/indianenergy/articles/tribes-map-their-energy-futures-strategic-energy-planning>

Strategic Energy Planning Handbook (PDF):
https://www.energy.gov/sites/prod/files/2015/08/f25/2a_Strategic%20Energy%20Planning.pdf

DOE Tribal Energy Program

Tribal Energy Program Overview: <https://toolkit.climate.gov/tool/tribal-energy-program>

Spark Northwest

Energy Planning Guide for NW Tribes: <https://sparknorthwest.org/get-involved/stay-informed/>

Organization Homepage: <https://sparknorthwest.org/>

Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians (ATNI)

Energy Sovereignty Summit: <https://atntribes.org/events-conventions/atni-2025-energy-sovereignty-summit/>

ATNI Energy Committee: <https://atntribes.org/committees/energy-commi/>

Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals (ITEP)

Assessment & Planning Tools: <https://www.icrn.us/assessment>

MTERA Resource Library

Midwest Tribal Energy Resource Library: <https://www.mtera.org/resource-library/>

EPA Tribal Energy Resources

EPA Tribal Resources: <https://www.epa.gov/statelocalenergy/tribal-resources>

Planning Guide for Tribal Energy Sovereignty

Energy Sovereignty Planning Guide (PDF):
<https://northcoastresourcepartnership.org/site/assets/uploads/2018/06/Energy-Sovereignty-Planning-Guide-12-14-2016.pdf>

Energy Transitions Initiative Partnership Project (ETIPP)

Program Overview: <https://www.energy.gov/eere/etipp/energy-transitions-initiative-partnership-project>

How to Apply / Get Involved: <https://www.energy.gov/eere/etipp/technical-assistance>

Community Projects and Case Studies: <https://www.energy.gov/eere/etipp/etipp-community-projects>

Alliance for Tribal Clean Energy

Organization Overview: <https://www.alliancefortribalcleanenergy.org/>

Programs and Services: <https://www.alliancefortribalcleanenergy.org/programs>

Contact and Partnership Opportunities: <https://www.alliancefortribalcleanenergy.org/contact>

Puget Sound Energy

[Utility Energy Services Contracting \(UESC\)](#): A service designed to help our federal and tribal customers achieve their energy, resource-conservation and resiliency targets. Our goal is to be a one-stop resource and partner from development to implantation for your projects. A great resource to help develop your TSEP.

[Multi-Occupant Solar](#): Generate your own power and share the savings with your tribal members and tenants. This program provides a way for property owners to install a solar system on their building and distribute financial credits directly to tenants' utility bills.

[Renewable Energy Options](#) for your business:

- PSE Match: An easy affordable way to match your business' energy use with renewable energy.
- PSE Replace: Elevate your commitment to the environment by replacing your business' energy use with renewable energy delivered to PSE's grid.
- PSE Generate: Your business can generate its own renewable energy, offsetting the cost of its conventional energy use without losing PSE's reliability.

[Rebates and incentives](#): PSE is here to help with a large array of energy-efficiency programs that pay you incentives and rebates for reducing energy consumption. Incentive programs for great savings on energy bills, carbon emissions reduction, lower equipment maintenance costs, increased productivity and comfort with improved lighting, visibility, and air temperature. Get in touch with an [energy advisor](#) for more information.

[PSE Up & Go Electric](#): Under the Empower Mobility Programs, all PSE Up & Go Electric programs include enhanced incentives for transportation electrification projects benefitting historically underrepresented communities and the community-based organizations, government agencies and Tribal entities that serve them.

- Up & Go Electric Home Charging: Save on home charging via a PSE rebate and additional charging incentives.
- Up & Go Electric for Public: Help to easily and affordably install public charging for all EV drivers.
- Up & Go for Fleet: Empowering businesses, municipalities and tribes by electrifying their fleet.
- Up & Go Electric for Multifamily: Bringing charging to multifamily properties to attract new residents and keep existing ones.
- Up & Go for Workplace: Bringing charging to workplaces so employees can electrify their communities.

[PSE's Decarbonization Grant Program](#): PSE leverages funds from Washington State's Climate Commitment Act to help local organizations replace natural gas equipment with energy efficient electric alternatives. This program specifically supports organizations that serve vulnerable populations by covering the costs of sustainable energy upgrades to make them more accessible to our community.

[PSE's Solar Grant program](#): These solar grants are funding to increase equitable access to the benefits of solar. Solar installations allow community-based organizations, government agencies, and Tribal entities to save money through lower utility bills, increasing the funding available to them to support their communities.

[PSE's Transportation Emission Reduction \(TER\) Grant](#): PSE will help fund projects promoting transportation electrification in our service area with preference given to projects that primarily benefit residential and designated communities.

[PSE's Flex](#) demand response programs: Our demand for energy is growing, which can sometimes put stress on the electrical grid. To address this, we use a strategy known as demand response. This approach helps manage energy consumption during periods of high demand, which we refer to as "Flex events." During these times, there are several ways that both residential and business customers can participate in reducing energy usage—and earn rewards for doing so.

- [Flex EV](#)
- [Flex Rewards](#)
- [Flex Energy Saving Tips](#)

[Flex Batteries Enhanced Incentives](#): These incentives make battery energy storage systems more accessible by offsetting the upfront equipment and installation costs. Through PSE's flex batteries program, you can save money at the time of installation and earn over the life of your system. You may be eligible to receive up to \$10,000 in enhanced incentives towards the upfront cost of your battery in addition to \$1,000 per battery for enrolling in Flex Batteries, plus up to \$500 per battery each year! Enhanced incentives are available to residential electric customers who work with a Recommended Energy Professional to connect an eligible battery system to PSE's grid that meets certain requirements.

[Tribal Tax Exemption](#): PSE works in partnership with sovereign tribal nations to foster trusted, long-lasting relationships. We engage regularly and proactively with tribal communities and tribal organizations to find creative opportunities for collaboration. As a company we consistently work to increase tribal relations acumen to support the development of processes and policies. For more information, contact us at tribalrelations@pse.com.

To apply for tribal utility tax exemption please complete the [Public Utility Tax Exemption form](#) and email to TribalTaxExemptions@pse.com.