As solar and other climate infrastructure construction accelerates, and with Californians concerned both about the cost of living and about seeing local opportunities result from climate projects, the conversation about community benefits (commitments to hiring and other local investments made by developers in connection with new projects) has grown increasingly animated in California and even more so in this year's legislative session. One component enabling successful deployment of community benefits tools is community capacity, including technical assistance and technical expertise. Over much of the last decade, the state has been funneling resources into this kind of support through a diverse set of climate initiatives. A new CLEE analysis, *Mapping State Investments in Community and Climate*, highlights how these programs fit together and what state leaders should consider as they craft the next generation of climate policy.

Some decision makers are currently weighing whether community benefits should be incorporated into clean energy and climate infrastructure projects (and if so, how), while others are contemplating the best ways to harness the power of community benefits to backfill the recent revamping of the California Environmental Quality Act. In any scenario, it's important to consider what Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) and other community benefits tools are designed to do, and what their limitations are (CBAs are one form of multifaceted, legally binding community benefits package. Other community benefits tools include project labor agreements, community benefits funds, and local hire commitments.).

Dropping community benefits into a host municipality or region as a standalone measure is unlikely to achieve the transformative effects that policy makers seek. This is because Community Benefits Agreements in and of themselves do not guarantee success; rather, the contents of a final community benefits package often depend on what the parties negotiate, which requires active participation (and capacity) from all sides. Other community benefits tools may not require negotiation but are still unlikely to succeed without support and involvement from the community.

To achieve meaningful community benefits, then, and to help level the playing field with project developers, community groups must be supported by "soft infrastructure," which includes:

- the civic and local organizations and structures that provide decision-making and operational capacity in communities, including technical assistance and legal expertise,

    - the governance systems that provide community-oriented project management and ownership; enforceable pathways to deliver community benefits; and project oversight, transparency, and accountability, and
    - the ownership and business models that provide equitable access to clean technology and deliver economic benefits for the most impacted communities

These soft infrastructure components can drive success in launching new projects and sustaining them over the long term, especially when they support community benefits that are conceived of in partnership with impacted community groups and implemented well. Together, soft infrastructure and community benefits can further economic development and enable the construction of equitable climate infrastructure projects.

Before coordinating community benefits and soft infrastructure, however, it's helpful to know what soft infrastructure has already been put in place. A new report from CLEE, *Mapping State Investments in Community and Climate*, summarizes existing soft infrastructure created by state investments in climate mitigation and equity-driven capacity building and technical assistance programs, through initiatives such as California Jobs First and Transformative Climate Communities. The report also describes how state investments have coalesced in two specific regions, the North and Central Coasts of California, chosen because of their potential to be sites of offshore wind Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) in the future. While these regions have neither the concentrated air pollution nor potential for GHG reduction of places such as the Central Valley and Los Angeles, the need for climate mitigation and adaptation, along with good, family supporting jobs, is key for both areas. CLEE's analysis shows that these regions are both ripe for climate project investment, if pursued in tandem with community benefits that harness and augment existing soft infrastructure and if linked to climate projects that catalyze in-state job creation and long-term economic growth.

CLEE's new report provides a basis for evaluating functional and geographic gaps to address in future planning and can help ensure that community members leverage programs effectively, without duplicating efforts. Comprehensively mapping the intricate web of soft infrastructure initiatives in a region can also provide an entry point for project developers to work with existing community entities to ensure that projects align with community goals and deliver meaningful and relevant benefits, which can increase project success and durability and contribute to economic development.

If synergized, California's climate and community investments present an opportunity to create stronger community and civic networks (i.e., soft infrastructure) and in doing so, ensure that new climate infrastructure projects are developed in a durable, but also an equitable and sustainable, way. However, in order to recognize equitable development, the state must recommit to its community climate investments, including programs such as California's Community Assistance for Climate Equity Program, highlighted in CLEE's report.

The full report can be accessed here.

This report forms part of CLEE's new initiative supporting equitable climate infrastructure investment, including research and partnerships on models of community oversight, governance, and benefits for climate infrastructure projects to achieve equity and economic development goals.