

Empowering Justice 40 Communities: A Workshop on Leveraging Community Benefit Agreements to Support the Department of Energy's Mandate to Serve Disadvantaged Communities

Committee

Devashree Saha

Chair

Devashree Saha is the Director of the U.S. Clean Energy Economy program. In this role, she supports policymakers and other stakeholders to ensure policies and strategies to advance the clean energy transition are fair and inclusive, with a focus on decent jobs, skills, economic development, equity, and putting people and communities at the center of the transition. Prior to joining WRI, Devashree led the Council of State Government's (CSG) energy and environmental policy work where she was responsible for directing research and providing policy analysis and technical assistance to state legislators and executive branch officials. Before joining CSG, Devashree worked at the Brookings Institution where her research focused on a wide array of clean energy topics, including examining clean energy innovation trends at the U.S. sub-national level, identifying promising clean energy financing mechanisms, and estimating the employment size, nature, and spatial geography of the U.S. clean economy. Earlier in her career, she worked for the National Governors Association, providing governors and their staff with data and guidance on best practices affecting the energy sector. Devashree holds a Ph.D. in Public Policy from the University of Texas at Austin and a master's degree in Political Science from Purdue University.

Marcel Akhame

Member

Marcel Akhame is an Associate with Breakthrough Energy's (BE) U.S. Policy and Advocacy team. He is a member of USPA's Strategic Initiatives program, where he primarily focuses on work related to communities, a just transition, and regional and state engagement. Prior to joining BE, Marcel was a Congressional Fellow with the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation. As a Congressional Fellow, he worked with the office of Congressman A. Donald McEachin and the U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources where he supported numerous environmental justice, energy, and climate legislative and advocacy actions through research, writing, outreach, and engagement. Before that, Marcel served as a Program Analyst at the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Office of Water (OW). While at the EPA, he managed a \$120 million grant program and supported OW in defining the benefits and methodology of the Pilot Programs within the initial rollout of the Justice40 initiative. Marcel holds a Master of Public Policy degree from American University, and a B.A. in Political Science from the University of North Texas.

Louise Bedsworth

Member

Louise Bedsworth is the Executive Director at the Center for Law, Energy, and the Environment (CLEE) at the University of California, Berkeley where she also serves as a Senior Advisor to the California China Climate Institute. Before joining CLEE, Louise spent nearly a decade working for the State of California, most recently as the Executive Director of the Strategic Growth Council, a Cabinet-level State institution that brings together multiple agencies and departments to support sustainable communities emphasizing strong economies, social equity, and environmental stewardship. While with the State, Louise also served as the Deputy Director of the Office of Planning and Research in Governor Jerry Brown's office. Louise received a Science in Public Science Award from the California Council on Science and Technology in 2020. Louise received a B.S. in Earth, Atmospheric, and Planetary Sciences from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and an M.S. in Environmental Engineering and a Ph.D. in Energy and Resources, both from the University of California at Berkeley. She is a member of the Board on Energy and Environmental Systems at the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine.

Margaret Cook

Member

Dr. Margaret Cook is the Deputy Director of Climate Equity & Resilience at the Houston Advanced Research Center. In this role, she develops and manages HARC's Climate Equity & Community Resilience initiative and supports community engagement and community benefits priorities within HARC projects. Her research interests include interconnections between water, energy, and climate science and policy, prioritizing equity and community resilience in this work. She is also passionate about making science accessible to the public. She has led multiple HARC projects throughout the Gulf Coast and Central Texas focused on energy, water, and climate equity issues such as reducing energy burden, increasing access to solar in low-income communities, and planning for climate impacts. Dr. Cook earned her Doctorate in Civil Engineering from the University of Texas at Austin Cockrell School of Engineering with a certificate in Engineering Education in 2018. She earned dual master's degrees in public Affairs and Environmental and Water Resources Engineering, and a B.S. in Civil Engineering from the University of Texas at Austin.

Daniel Rossi-Keen

Member

Daniel Rossi-Keen is the Executive Director of RiverWise, a community and economic development nonprofit organization in Beaver County, PA. Prior to founding RiverWise in 2018, Daniel served in numerous academic and community capacities in Ohio, Florida, and Pennsylvania. Daniel's research and applied expertise concern the role that hope plays in the health and vitality of a community. As a community and economic development intermediary working with nearly 100 different organizations, RiverWise acts as an ongoing site of applied inquiry. Daniel has served on or led the boards of over 30 local, regional, and state-wide nonprofit organizations. He has recently co-architected and launched the Justice 40 Opportunity Navigator, a multi-county initiative in southwest Pennsylvania that collaborates with federally designated environmental justice communities to fund and implement projects that improve their health and climate resilience. He has co-produced community-based documentary storytelling about both the petrochemical industry and the East Palestine train derailment. Daniel has published and presented his research widely in numerous domestic and international outlets. He holds a Ph.D. and M.A. in Rhetoric and Culture and an M.A. in Philosophy, all from Ohio University. Daniel also earned an M.A. in Theological Studies from Reformed Theological Seminary and a B.A. in Interdisciplinary Studies from Grove City College.

Natasha Udu-gama

Member

Natasha Udu-gama serves as Director of Community Science Advancement and Sustainability with AGU Thriving Earth Exchange. In this role, she is advancing the practice and sustained use of community science globally. Natasha has been part of AGU's Thriving Earth Exchange team since 2014 and has contributed over 10 years of disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation, community engagement, and partnership experience to the development of AGU's community science approach in her 9 years at AGU. Since 2023, she has served on the Board of Directors of the Open Environmental Data Project (OEDP) and has served as an advisor in various capacities for the Union of Concerned Scientists, an NSF EAGER project on Equity and Co-Production with GMU and others. Her Ph.D. in Environment and Geography specializing in multi-sector partnerships for effective and sustainable community-owned early warning systems is from Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia.

Vangela M. Wade

Member

Vangela M. Wade is president and CEO of the Mississippi Center for Justice (MCJ), a nonprofit, public interest law firm with a 20-year record of fighting for equity in housing, voting rights, healthcare, and other issues. Under Wade's leadership, MCJ launched projects focused on heirs' property, education, and civic engagement. The organization has championed Medicaid expansion; represented the only abortion clinic in Mississippi in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, the Supreme Court case that overturned *Roe v. Wade*; and pioneered work in fair housing that led Mississippi to rewrite its eviction laws. Wade's previous professional positions include serving as: a law clerk with the Mississippi Court of Appeal; Special Prosecutor for the Madison/Rankin County District Attorney's Office; corporate employment law attorney with local and national employment law firms; adjunct law professor at the University of Mississippi School of Law; and diversity and fair employment practices consultant for corporations, government, and nonprofits. Wade has received numerous honors throughout her career, including: an appointment to the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine's Planning Committee for Empowering Justice 40 Communities; Magnolia Bar Association's Legal Services Award; Metro Jackson Black Women Lawyers Association Attorney of the Year; Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under the Law Edwin D. Wolf Award; National Bar Association Women Lawyers Division 50th Anniversary Impact Award; and Black Voices for Black Justice honoree. Wade holds a Bachelor of Arts from Mississippi State University and a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law.