

Chumash Community Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Project

Program Profile



Cultivating Partnerships to Advance Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy in a Tribal Community

The Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians overcame barriers to energy efficiency and renewable energy (EE/RE) by using trusted community members as messengers and cultivating partnerships that led to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and the creation of an ongoing EE/RE job training program. The Santa Ynez Chumash are a federally recognized tribe located in Santa Barbara County, California. Approximately 250 people reside on the Santa Ynez reservation, with additional tribal members living in surrounding towns.

Like many tribal nations, the Santa Ynez Chumash face barriers to achieving widespread deployment of both residential and commercial EE/RE, such as a lack of information about and interest in EE/RE opportunities and difficulty in obtaining financing. The Santa Ynez Chumash Environmental Office (SYCEO) created a program with the following elements designed to address each of these challenges: partnerships with local contractors to establish the Chumash Community Energy Program (CCEP), an EE/RE jobs training and apprenticeship program; an extensive outreach campaign, including door-to-door promotion by trusted members of the tribe; and a residential solar panel give-away program and utility rebates.

By relying on community members themselves and building strong partnerships, the Santa Ynez Chumash created a model that can help other tribal communities benefit from reduced energy bills, improved home conditions, and EE/RE job creation.

Fast Facts

Program scope: A voluntary program to advance solar power and energy efficiency through personalized outreach, rebates and contests, and on-the-job training.

Communities served: Members of the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians, including low-income tribal members.

Funding: A U.S. EPA Climate Showcase Communities grant, an Administration for Native Americans grant, and utility rebates.

Key partners: The local utility, tribal descendants interested in obtaining EE/RE jobs, and local contractors committed to the well-being of the community.





Making It Happen

A key success of CCEP was to open doors to the EE/RE job market for low-income tribal members. SYCEO staff achieved this by creating a customized job development program to draw interest and encourage participation. While many tribal descendants were interested in receiving solar installation training, most were not as interested in training related to energy efficiency due to the highly technical nature of the field. To help with this challenge, SYCEO developed a training program that fit the specific education needs and skill level of the trainees and also provided remedial skills training as needed. In addition, SYCEO staff identified and engaged contractors with an interest in the well-being of the tribal community and a willingness to take time and effort to work with the trainees. Five CCEP graduates were hired by these partner firms and 10 tribal descendants were hired by the tribe. The success of the training program also enabled the tribe to secure additional funding from the Administration for Native Americans to continue to expand its EE/RE jobs training program to benefit more members of the community. The direct involvement of tribal descendants in the solar and energy efficiency installations not only reduced labor costs but also built confidence in the EE/RE measures both on and off the reservation.

“Through the CCEP I have been able to get comfortable providing quotes for home energy upgrades, as well as leading the team that performs the upgrades. My skill set has expanded from technical building performance knowledge to customer interaction, creating quotes through Excel, and teaching technical skills to trainees during assessments and upgrades.”

Tim Ochoa, CCEP graduate

In addition to the challenge of attracting participants to the job training program, SYCEO initially had difficulty convincing homeowners in the tribal community to invest in energy efficiency upgrades. While the primary barrier was upfront costs, the Chumash community also had a general wariness of outside contractors based on past experiences. SYCEO offered subsidized labor from the trainees and the utility rebates to make the upgrades more affordable, but many residents were still not persuaded. To get past this hurdle, the CCEP trainees, who were tribal descendants known and trusted in the community, went door-to-door to talk with homeowners about energy efficiency and also perform free energy audits. This familiarity made the homeowners more willing to conduct the upgrades.

An additional driver for energy efficiency upgrades among lower income homeowners was the creation of a solar “giveaway” program. SYCEO offered eight solar PV systems as prizes for homeowners who completed energy efficiency upgrades. By making efficiency a prerequisite for



the solar installations, SYCEO saw a dramatic uptick in interest for energy efficiency upgrades and was able to promote a more holistic approach to home energy management. The giveaway also made renewable energy accessible for several lower-income Chumash descendants who had been unable to pay for the upfront costs due to difficulties in obtaining loans for improvements on land that is held in federal trust. To further attract interest in the solar upgrades, SYCEO demonstrated their benefits by installing solar PV systems on two prominent community buildings.

Finally, SYCEO established relationships with the local utility, Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E), which helped it better understand and take advantage of utility rebates that made energy efficiency upgrades more cost-effective. Establishing this rapport with the utility led to several rebates, including a \$25,000 commercial lighting upgrade completed for free by applying two separate but overlapping rebates.

Key Partners

To make the project a success, SYCEO staff worked with local contractors interested in helping the tribal community and willing to invest time and effort to train members. SYCEO staff partnered closely with the utility to take full advantage of its rebates. In addition, they enlisted known and trusted community members to increase the receptiveness to energy efficiency and renewable energy upgrades in the community.

Funding Sources

The project was able to leverage a \$500,000 U.S. EPA Climate Showcase Communities grant¹ with a \$400,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service's Administration for Native Americans to continue to expand the job training program. The project also used rebates from the local utility.

Achievements

By working with committed partners and building the community's confidence, SYCEO was able to bring EE/RE and associated jobs to the tribal community.

Energy Upgrades and Emissions Reductions

- The solar installations on the Tribal Hall and Health Clinic save 90,000 kilowatt-hours and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 42 metric tons of CO₂ annually,² equivalent to the energy-related emissions from four average American homes over a year.³



- CCEP trainees completed 62 energy audits, with 88 percent of audited buildings (55) going on to perform energy upgrades. Corresponding energy savings data are currently being measured and verified.⁴
- In addition to 43 solar projects in the broader Santa Barbara County community, CCEP trainees completed solar projects on 15 of the 100 residences on the reservation.⁴

Job Training and Job Creation

- Fifty tribal descendants received on-the-job training for solar energy and/or energy efficiency.⁴
- Ten tribal descendants were hired for jobs with local contractors or SYCEO.⁴

Replicability

SYCEO staff helped promote replication of the successful aspects of the project nationwide, including to other tribal communities, by disseminating information on the project at conferences and workshops. The major tenets of the program that serve as models for replication include:

- Seeking out and establishing relationships with local contractors who are committed to helping the community by offering apprenticeships to tribal members.
- Enlisting people known in the community to encourage program participation by educating their neighbors about the benefits of energy efficiency and renewable energy.
- Requiring energy efficiency measures as a prerequisite for receiving solar energy financial incentives.

For More Information

- [Santa Ynez Chumash Community Energy Program Website](#)

¹ See <https://www.epa.gov/statelocalclimate/climate-showcase-communities-program> for more information.

² Calculated from solar energy monitoring data from <http://live.deckmonitoring.com/?id=chumash> and the regional non-baseload electricity factor from [eGRID](#).

³ Estimated using EPA's [Greenhouse Gas Equivalencies Calculator](#).

⁴ Santa Ynez Chumash Community Energy Program, 2015. Final Report under the Climate Showcase Communities Program. Submitted to EPA on December 17, 2015.