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**LAC and HSEF Comments - Tribal Equitable Building
Decarbonization Direct Install Program (CEC Docket No 22-
DECARB-03)**

Additional submitted attachment is included below.



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October 16, 2025

California Energy Commission
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**RE: County of Los Angeles Responses on Request for Information on the Tribal
Equitable Building Decarbonization Direct Install Program (CEC Docket No.
22-DECARB-03)**

Dear California Energy Commission,

The County of Los Angeles (the County) and High Sierra Energy Foundation, appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on the California Energy Commission's (CEC) draft guidelines for the Tribal Direct Install Program under the Equitable Building Decarbonization (EBD) initiative.

We commend the CEC for setting aside dedicated funding for tribes and tribal members. This Program has the potential to deliver transformational benefits by advancing energy equity, supporting tribal sovereignty, and ensuring California Native American communities are fully included in the state's decarbonization goals.

The County and its partners aim to help communities across Southern and Central California shape a safe, secure, resilient, and affordable clean energy future. Programs should have a strong focus on equity, workforce development, and leveraging partnerships to maximize impact for under-resourced and historically underserved communities.

Application Process and Tiered Allocation

1. Application process: What are your thoughts on the tiered approach for the allocation of additional funds?

The proposed tiered funding structure creates transparency, but it may not capture the variation in retrofit costs across regions. Remote and rural tribes face higher labor and transportation costs, and the tiers as drafted could leave larger housing stocks underfunded. A hybrid approach, combining a base allocation with tiered and per-household factors, would better align resources with need. Tribes should also be able to demonstrate unique circumstances, such as dispersed housing or higher rural construction costs, when requesting additional funds.

The current tiered structure could better enhance community outcomes by taking building vintage into account. When evaluating project scope and costs, it's essential to consider the age and condition of the building. Older buildings often have outdated infrastructure that requires extensive electrical upgrades. These remediation and electrical improvements are subject to cost cap controls, which can significantly affect project feasibility and budgeting. In addition, aging infrastructure typically requires more equipment and materials, increasing project complexity and extending the time needed for engineering assessments and permitting. As a result, projects involving older buildings are inherently more resource-intensive and costly.

To address these disparities, a tiered approach based on building vintage, rather than solely on housing stock would promote a more equitable allocation of equitably allocate funds. This method would ensure that properties with older, more compromised infrastructure, often owned by those with fewer financial resources, receive the additional support they need. Aligning funding with the actual complexity and cost of upgrades would improve fairness and enable broader participation in electrification efforts, especially among vulnerable communities and building types.

Tiered Funding Model Based on Building Vintage

Tier	Building Construction Year	Infrastructure Condition	Upgrade Complexity	Additional Funding Allocation (added to base amount)
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Tier 1	Pre-1940	Very Poor – outdated wiring, panels, low capacity, possible knob-and-tube systems	Very High	\$25,000
Tier 2	1940–1969	Poor – aging systems, potential code non-compliance, limited capacity	High	\$18,000
Tier 3	1970–1999	Fair – some modern systems; but may require panel upgrades or rewiring	Moderate	\$10,000
Tier 4	2000–Present	Good – generally meets modern standards; minimal remediation or upgrades needed	Low	\$3,000

Program Implementer Selection

2. Program Implementer: What qualifications or criteria are important to consider when selecting the program implementer?

The qualifications of the program implementer will be critical to the Program’s success. We encourage the CEC to prioritize implementers with direct experience working with tribal communities, cultural competency, and a demonstrated understanding of tribal sovereignty. The implementer must be capable of recruiting and training local and tribal contractors, not just larger market actors, to ensure that economic benefits remain in tribal communities. It is also important that the implementer be able to coordinate with other state, federal, and utility programs to leverage funding and avoid duplication.

Equally important, the implementor must understand and honor tribal procurement and contracting processes, including tribal preference policies and prioritize employment and contracting within tribal communities. Respecting these processes is essential to maintaining trust and ensuring

program delivery aligns with tribal governance and values. To support this, the CEC should provide technical assistance and flexibility to help tribes reconcile their procurement practice with state and federal contracting requirements, ensuring that compliance does not become a barrier to participation.

The current serialized approach to the program timeline—waiting until the six-month tribal enrollment period concludes before releasing the Requests for Proposals (RFP) for the program implementer—creates challenges that could limit program effectiveness. We understand the need-to-know which tribes will implement directly before finalizing the implementer’s scope and budget. The CEC should consider leveraging existing programs or the statewide EBD program to support outreach, education, and application support during enrollment. Without that early engagement, there is a risk that some tribes may delay or decline participation due to uncertainty or lack of capacity, ultimately reducing program reach and equity.

Finally, while one statewide implementer may be administratively efficient, we encourage the CEC to consider whether a regional implementer model, or at minimum a statewide implementer working in partnership with tribal-serving organizations, would provide more equitable and responsive delivery.

Tribal Participation Choices

Tribal Decision-Making: Direct Grants or Implementer Services

The choice between receiving a direct grant and opting for services through the Program implementer is an important one, and both pathways must be equally viable. Some tribes may choose direct grants in order to maintain control and sovereignty over Program design and delivery. Others may prefer the implementer model, particularly if they face limited administrative capacity. To make an informed decision, tribes will need clear information about Program timelines and the period of performance, especially given the 2030 liquidation deadline, which shortens the implementation window by up to two years compared to the broader statewide EBD Program. Tribes will also need clarity on how the administrative cost cap will function in both pathways. It should be made clear that the implementer’s administrative costs will not reduce the funding available for projects or households served under the non-implementing pathway. Further,

implementing tribes should be able to access the implementer's resources, such as a contractor pool or technical expertise, should they wish to do so.

Encouraging broad tribal participation will also require dedicated outreach, pre-application technical support, and flexibility in how tribes can structure their involvement. For example, the Program should allow tribes to apply as a consortium, pooling their resources to increase scale and efficiency, and should also permit tribes to subcontract or sub out implementation while retaining Program authority.

Administrative Cost Cap and Non-implementing Tribes

We appreciate that the draft guidelines include a 10% cap on administrative costs; however, greater clarity is needed on how this cap will apply in practice, particularly for non-implementing tribes. It is unclear whether the program implementer's administrative budget will reduce the funding available for direct project costs in non-implementing communities. If so, there is a risk that households served under the non-implementing pathway could receive fewer benefits compared to those under the implementing pathway, simply because of higher administrative overhead.

To avoid this inequity, we recommend that the CEC establish separate administrative budgets—outside of the base allocation. This would ensure that the implementer's overhead does not erode the resources available for project delivery in tribal communities. In addition, the CEC should include clear guardrails on allowable administrative costs for implementers to prevent escalation over time. Transparency in how administrative expenses are reported and tracked will be critical to ensuring that the majority of funds are directed to retrofits and household benefits, regardless of which implementation pathway a tribe selects.

Education and Community Engagement

For building decarbonization programs to succeed in communities, education and awareness are as critical as installation. Many households are unfamiliar with the technologies being offered—such as heat pumps, induction cooking, or electrical upgrades—and without clear communication on how these systems work, they may be met with hesitation or dissatisfaction after installation. Providing culturally relevant education, demonstrations, and ongoing user support will help build trust, ensure informed consent, and improve long-term satisfaction and system performance.

To achieve this, the guidelines should specify where education and engagement activities are budgeted. It is unclear whether the efforts fall under administrative costs, outreach, or direct project delivery. We recommend that the CEC clarify eligible budget categories and ensure sufficient funding is available for pre- and post-installation education, recognizing that these activities are essential to achieving durable program outcomes, not optional administrative overhead.

Additional Considerations

First, tribal sovereignty must remain at the center of this Program. Tribes should retain decision-making authority over which homes are served, which contractors are hired, and which retrofit measures are prioritized. The guidelines should also allow flexibility for tribes to propose alternative retrofit packages that reflect their unique housing stock, cultural preferences, and climate conditions.

Second, while the guaranteed minimum allocation of \$75,000 is an important foundation, it is not sufficient to cover meaningful decarbonization if spread across multiple households. We recommend indexing the minimum to regional cost differences, particularly for rural and remote tribes where costs are higher. The CEC can work with existing EBD Regional Administrators to determine what these recommended indexes could be given the work they have already completed in determining program cost caps and controls. The minimum allocation should also serve as a foundation for distributing additional funds, with priority given to tribes that are underserved, geographically isolated or face unique barriers to participation. Ensuring that these communities receive targeted support will help achieve the program's equity and accessibility goals.

Third, resilience must be a stronger focus. Many tribes face unreliable grid service, and the exclusion of solar PV and standalone battery storage from eligible measures risks leaving critical gaps. At minimum, the guidelines should explicitly enable coordination with solar and storage programs, and the CEC should consider including limited resilience measures within the Program itself. Similarly, tribes that rely on propane backup in rural areas need clarity on whether hybrid solutions or limited use of portable backup generators could be allowable and covered under program costs.

Workforce development is another key area. While the guidelines appropriately emphasize the use of licensed and trained contractors, there is a risk of unintentionally excluding smaller tribal contractors who may not have the same certifications as larger firms. Workforce provisions must be paired with investments in tribal capacity. Without additional support, smaller tribal contractors may be excluded by strict licensing requirements. Funding for apprenticeships, training, and partnerships with tribal colleges will help ensure program dollars build lasting capacity.

The program should also recognize that tribes have their own procurement and contracting processes, often guided by tribal preference policies that prioritize hiring within their communities. The CEC should ensure these sovereign procurement approaches are fully respected and integrated into program requirements so that workforce participation aligns with tribal laws and community values. As noted in the Program Implementer section, respecting tribal procurement and providing technical assistance to align those processes with state and federal requirements will be key to ensuring equitable participation and compliance.

Finally, data collection and reporting must respect tribal data sovereignty and privacy. Household-level data requirements may create concerns and administrative burdens for tribes. We urge CEC to provide options for aggregate reporting and simplified reporting pathways, particularly for tribes with limited staff capacity.

Conclusion

The Tribal EBD Direct Install Program represents a critical opportunity to deliver decarbonization benefits in tribal communities while respecting sovereignty, building workforce capacity, and improving resilience. We commend the CEC for developing this dedicated Program and for inviting tribal input at this early stage. By refining the funding approach, strengthening workforce and capacity-building provisions, clarifying administrative and timeline requirements, and explicitly addressing resilience, and data sovereignty, the CEC can ensure this Program is both effective and equitable.

Respectfully Submitted,

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