



A Fair and Equitable Clean Energy Transition in Alachua County

Alachua County, Florida is committed to transitioning to renewable energy in order to address the climate crisis and secure energy justice for low-income and underserved communities. Alachua County's community-led Project EMPOWER (Energy Modernization for People, Opportunity, Work, Equity, and Renewables) is focused on making the clean energy transition fair and equitable for everyone.

As part of this effort, Project EMPOWER is partnering with the U.S. Department of Energy's **Communities LEAP** (Local Energy Action Program) Pilot.¹ Communities LEAP is providing technical assistance from top experts in clean energy-related economic development to community-led projects in 24 low-income, energy-burdened communities across the United States.

Starting in Gainesville's Springhill neighborhood, Project EMPOWER and Communities LEAP are working toward helping everyone in Alachua County access clean, reliable, and affordable energy and benefit from the economic opportunities of the renewable energy transition.

What is Project EMPOWER?

Project EMPOWER grew out of a 2021 NAACP forum on transitioning to 100% clean energy in Alachua County. The EMPOWER team's long-term goals include weatherizing and electrifying as many homes as possible, exploring the potential for solar projects and resilient microgrids in energy-burdened communities, and establishing a green jobs pipeline for Alachua County. A key component of these goals is prioritizing fairness and equity as communities transition to clean energy.

Energy Inequities in Alachua County

Energy burdens for low-income families

Low-income families in Alachua County have disproportionately high energy burdens, spending an average 22% of their annual income on household energy costs while the average for all families is just 5.5%.²



Dr. Paul Broadie II, NKwanda Jah, and Shane Andrew at the Project EMPOWER and Santa Fe College Green Jobs Pipeline Roundtable in October 2022. Photo from Daniel Blumberg, Gainesville Community Reinvestment Area

Project EMPOWER Team Members

- Alachua County NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Committee
- Alachua County's Sustainability, Equity, Economic and Strategic Development Department
- Gainesville Regional Utilities (GRU)
- Gainesville Community Reinvestment Area and Gainesville Housing & Community Development Departments
- Community Weatherization Coalition/Rebuilding Together North Central Florida (CWC/RTNCF)

Housing and racial disparities contribute to energy burden

Low-income families are more likely to live in older, less energy-efficient houses, especially in East Gainesville—which means these families must pay more for energy to heat or cool their homes. Many of these families live in rental housing, which is often not well-maintained.³ In Alachua County, Black residents are more likely to live in older, smaller houses with lower home values than white-owned houses, limiting the home equity available for upgrades. They are also more likely to live in rentals and have heating and cooling systems that do not work well.⁴

1 U.S. Department of Energy. "Communities LEAP Pilot." Accessed February 2023. <https://www.energy.gov/communitiesLEAP/communities-leap>

2 Knowles, H., Jarrett, L. 2017. Understanding Racial Inequity in Alachua County. https://www.bebr.ufl.edu/sites/default/files/Research%20Reports/ri2_housing_transportation_neighborhood_baselines.pdf

3 LeFever, B. 2017. "Energy Burden." National Public Radio WUFT. Accessed February 2023. <https://projects.wuft.org/energy-burden/deficient-dwellings/high-costs-of-renting/>

4 Knowles, H., Jarrett, L. 2017. Understanding Racial Inequity in Alachua County. https://www.bebr.ufl.edu/sites/default/files/Research%20Reports/ri2_housing_transportation_neighborhood_baselines.pdf

Clean Energy Jobs in Florida & Alachua County

Projected clean energy jobs growth in Florida

By 2030, nearly 100,000 new jobs will be created in Florida in four key energy sectors: energy efficiency, solar PV, battery storage, and land-based wind. Most of these new jobs will likely come from utility energy efficiency programs.⁵ GRU is actively hiring for energy efficiency and other clean energy positions. See examples of the types of roles available here: <https://cityofgainesville.wd5.myworkdayjobs.com/Careers>.

Project EMPOWER's green jobs pipeline

Project EMPOWER is committed to expanding local access to green jobs opportunities. On October 31, 2022, Project EMPOWER and Santa Fe College hosted a roundtable to discuss creating a green jobs pipeline that would include training, internship, and employment opportunities in Alachua County. Following the roundtable, Project EMPOWER helped create a green jobs advisory committee to continue working towards this goal.

Communities LEAP Technical Assistance for Alachua County

Through Communities LEAP, the U.S. Department of Energy's National Renewable Energy Laboratory is helping Project EMPOWER explore how Alachua County can develop green jobs and benefit from investments in weatherization, solar power, and microgrids.

Weatherization is a term for increasing the energy efficiency of a home by adding insulation, sealing leaks, or installing more efficient windows to save money on energy costs and make homes more comfortable and resilient to extreme temperatures. Project EMPOWER is building on the work of other programs in the county that already help with weatherization. These programs include: **GRU's LEEP+ program**,⁶ which helps low- and moderate-income families make home improvements that lower their energy use; the **CWC Home Energy Tune-up Program**,⁷ which gives free energy

check-ups to homeowners and renters; and the **Central Florida Community Action Agency**,⁸ which helps people with their energy bills and rent and provides free weatherization services for low-income residents.

Solar power can be used to cost-effectively convert sunlight into electricity to power homes and businesses.⁹ Rooftop solar power is increasingly affordable and, in 2022, Florida deployed the second highest amount of residential solar capacity in the United States.¹⁰ In addition to rooftop solar, community solar provides customers an option to buy or lease part of a larger, off-site solar system.

Microgrids connect distributed energy sources (e.g., solar power and battery storage) to meet local energy needs (e.g., at a hospital, university, or neighborhood) even when the larger grid experiences weather-related or other interruptions.

Green jobs are jobs in businesses that produce goods or provide services that benefit the environment or conserve natural resources.¹¹ As of 2021, Florida had 212,120 jobs in the following sectors: electric power generation; transmission, distribution, and storage; and energy efficiency.¹² Alachua County's energy transition can create more green jobs in underserved areas that haven't historically had access to these opportunities.



Project EMPOWER's NKwanda Jah addresses attendees at the Green Jobs Pipeline Roundtable. Photo from Sean McLendon, Alachua County Board of County Commissioners, Florida

Throughout the project, Communities LEAP and Project EMPOWER welcome feedback from community members. Community guidance and technical assistance will be used to develop a plan for moving towards using 100% clean energy in Alachua County in a way that is fair for everyone, especially low-income and minority communities.

Learn more about Project EMPOWER at www.energy.gov/communitiesLEAP or contact Empower.Alachua@gmail.com.

5 National Renewable Energy Laboratory. "SLOPE: State and Local Planning for Energy." Accessed January 27, 2023. <https://maps.nrel.gov/slope>

6 Gainesville Regional Utilities. "Low-Income Energy Efficiency Program Plus." Accessed February 2023. <https://www.gru.com/MyHome/LowerMyBill/SaveEnergy/Low-incomeEnergyEfficiencyProgramPlus.aspx>

7 Community Weatherization Coalition. "Home Energy Tune-Ups." Accessed February 2023. <https://communityweatherization.org/tune-up-application/>

8 Central Florida Community Action Agency. "Who We Are." Accessed February 2023. <https://www.cfcaa.org>

9 National Renewable Energy Laboratory. "Solar Energy Basics." Accessed February 16, 2023. <https://www.nrel.gov/research/re-solar.html>

10 Davis, M. et al. 2022. US Solar Market Insight: Full report, Q4 2022. Wood Mackenzie. Accessed February 16, 2023.

11 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. "Measuring Green Jobs." Accessed February 16, 2023. <https://www.bls.gov/green/home.htm>

12 Coplon-Newfield, G., Keyser, D., Schanzer, H. 2022. Energy Employment by State 2022. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Energy. https://www.energy.gov/sites/default/files/2022-06/USEER%202022%20State%20Report_0.pdf



For more information about Communities LEAP, visit: energy.gov/communitiesLEAP

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