REIMAGINING ENERGY FOR OUR COMMUNITIES
A CRISIS OF PROFIT OVER PEOPLE AND PLANET

The energy systems in place today, in which energy development, control, ownership, and decision-making resides within Wall Street and corporate electric utilities, negatively impact the health and safety of communities, and fail to provide the energy needed to live, especially in the face of climate disaster.
ENERGY JUSTICE RISING

From Alaska to Puerto Rico, communities being impacted first and worst by energy injustice and climate change are advancing reimagined energy systems. These alternatives redistribute power by ensuring communities can meet our needs ourselves. We call this Energy Democracy.

ENERGY DEMOCRACY is a process by which we advance frontline community empowerment and liberation. It is a framework that allows us to reimagine the ways we organize our lives and livelihoods toward new systems that support the health and wellbeing of our communities and ecosystems.

REFOCUS is a unified movement for energy justice that brings together communities leading local actions for energy democracy.

We are reimagining energy for our communities across the U.S.

THESE ARE OUR STORIES...
I come from an environmental justice community. I grew up near a bunch of different polluting facilities, including gas-fired power plants and electricity transformers, alongside a myriad of wires, diesel trucks, and crematoriums. In my work, I’ve come to recognize that the polluting industry benefits off the backs of poor communities and communities of color.

Organizing with the Local Clean Energy Alliance, I’ve learned to communicate a vision of an energy system that is not harmful to people, nor to anyone within the community where energy is produced. To us, energy democracy is about participation in designing the energy system we want to see in our communities - one that actually works for us, rather than hurting us. It’s about understanding and weighing in, to ensure we transition this system into a democratized structure that is accessible to all kinds of people: to renters, to people historically shut out from clean energy, and to poor folks.

We have seen how energy democracy can make real changes. In one election, we were able to increase member engagement by over 100%-from 700 votes to over 2000! Educate yourself, meet your local leadership, and learn the ongoing history behind your community’s politics...with people power, we can come together collectively to make a change and know that we are never alone!

If you want to really talk about equity, it’s about including the people that have been left out of the clean energy economy or any economy before that. We’re trying to make it accessible to all kinds of people, to renters, to people who have not had access to clean energy before, because that’s what it boils down to.

**I want you to know that you have a voice and within that voice, you’re going to make a change.”**

CATHARINE ROBINSON

**If you want to really talk about equity, it’s about including the people that have been left out of the clean energy economy or any economy before that. We’re trying to make it accessible to all kinds of people, to renters, to people who have not had access to clean energy before, because that’s what it boils down to.**

JESSICA TOVAR
When Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico in 2017, the centralized electric grid was not prepared for the high winds and flooding. When the storm passed, many people died because they didn’t have access to drinking water or the energy needed to power phones, fridges, or medical equipment. Places that did have power either had solar panels or unreliable fossil-fuel generators. In response to this disaster, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) allocated an unprecedented $16 billion for Puerto Rico’s electric system and hazard mitigation. Yet, FEMA did not include distributed renewable energy in its environmental assessment and local authorities opted instead to rebuild the exact same system that repeatedly collapses.

Five years later, the impacts of failing to **redistribute and diversify** the energy system by investing in rooftop solar and storage, energy efficiency, energy conservation, and demand response programs, was made apparent when Hurricane Fiona hit. Once again, the energy and water needed to live was not available. But Puerto Rico is not destined to be a place of disaster. The people of the archipelago already have mapped out—and in some places built—solutions to these challenges, as they refuse the centralized, fossil fuel system. It’s time for the government to finally listen, and restore power to the people.
A decentralized renewable energy model, in which energy development, control, ownership, and decision-making resides in the community, can resource our communities to meet our energy needs, ourselves. This alternative is the pathway to energy justice and key to responding to the climate crisis.
The Energy Democracy Project represents the efforts of its national network of Collaborators to increase the visibility and strength of the energy democracy movement—to enable it to define a new energy paradigm, to resist the existing energy establishment, and to pursue the transition to renewable energy models and solutions.

Visit ENERGYDEMOCRACY.US/REFOCUS to learn more and take action!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:
This zine is a collaborative tool made possible by the Reimagined Energy For Our Communities (REFOCUS) Campaign. We are grateful for the contributions from passionate activists, advocates, and individuals that helped produce this piece, and that continue to build people power across the country.

Anchors: hannah bouscher-gage, Selena Feliciano
Writers & Editors: Crystal Huang, Jessica Tovar, Nora Elmarzouky, Ruth Santiago, Al Weinrub
Interviewers: Ernesto Cruz, Selena Feliciano
Interviewees: Catherine Robinson, Jessica Tovar, Ruth Santiago, Bianca Sopoci-Belknap, Mariel Nanasi
Designer: Jason Killinger

ORGANIZATIONS
Comité Diálogo Ambiental - Ruth Santiago
Co-op Power - Ernesto Cruz
Emerald Cities Collaborative - Sonia Kikeri, Nora Elmarzouky
Energy Allies - Yesenia Rivera
Initiative for Energy Justice - Elena Itämeri, Melissa Sonntag, Subin DeVar
Local Clean Energy Alliance - Jessica Tovar, Al Weinrub
New York Energy Democracy Alliance - Adam Flint
New Energy Economy - Bianca Sopoci-Belknap
OneVoice - Catherine Robinson
People Power Solar Cooperative - hannah bouscher-gage
Race Forward - Vina Kay, Leah Obias
Southern Echo - Rachel Mayes
Solar United Neighbors - Jada Sherman