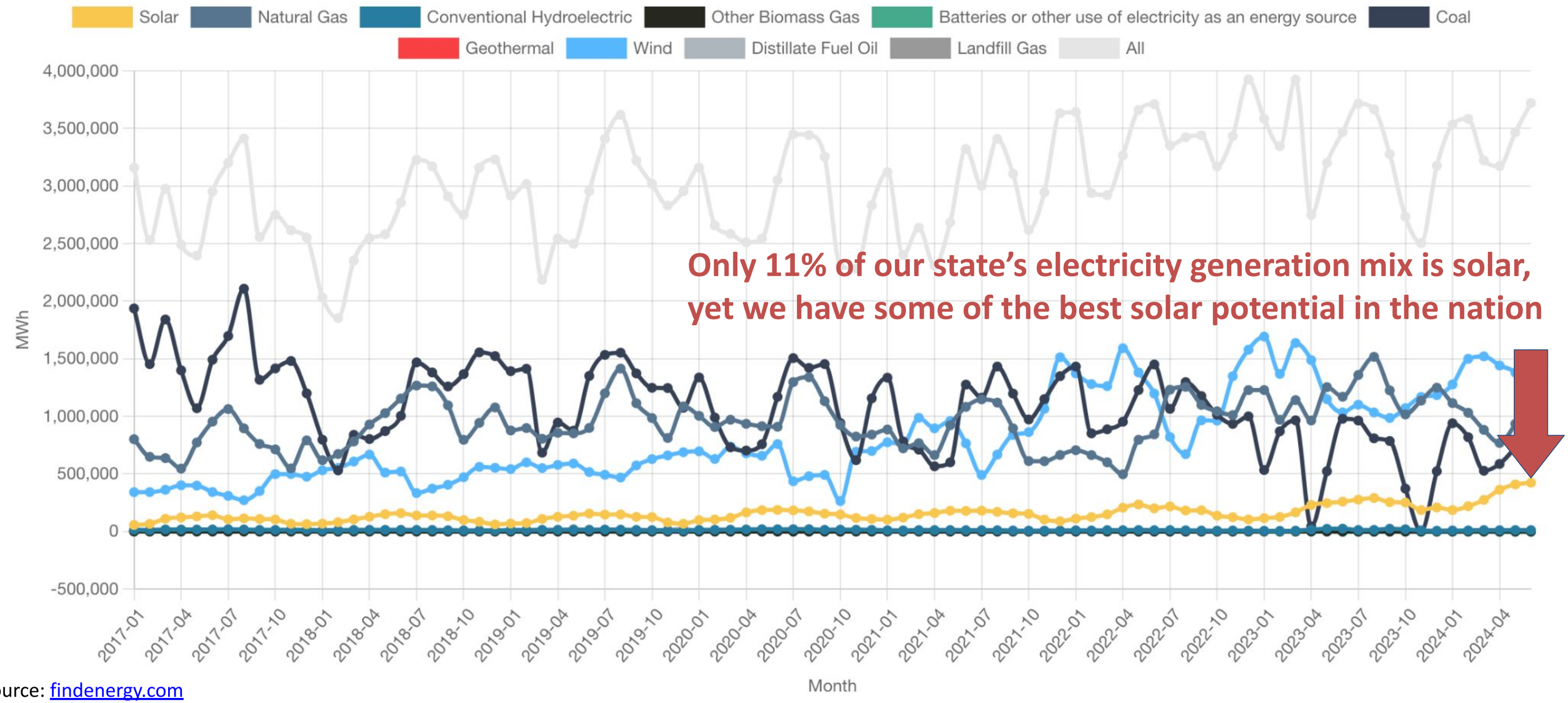

NEW MEXICO
LOCAL SOLAR
ACCESS FUND
AN INVESTMENT IN OUR COMMUNITIES AND OUR CHILDREN'S FUTURE
Sponsored by House Majority Whip Reena Szczepanski and Senator Harold Pope

New Mexico Electricity Fuel Mix

Production | Consumption | Emissions



Only 11% of our state's electricity generation mix is solar, yet we have some of the best solar potential in the nation

Source: findenergy.com

WHAT IS IT?

The Local Solar Access Fund is a proposed grant fund at the New Mexico Finance Authority, which will issue both planning and implementation grants to Tribes, Counties, Municipalities, and School Districts for solar and storage projects to power public buildings like libraries, schools, community centers, and fire stations, and infrastructure like water, wastewater, and street lighting.

Planning includes funding technical expertise like grant writers and federal funding experts, as well as solar experts who conduct feasibility studies and create plans for solar and storage systems.

Implementation includes funding construction, purchase, installation, and equipment of solar energy and storage systems.

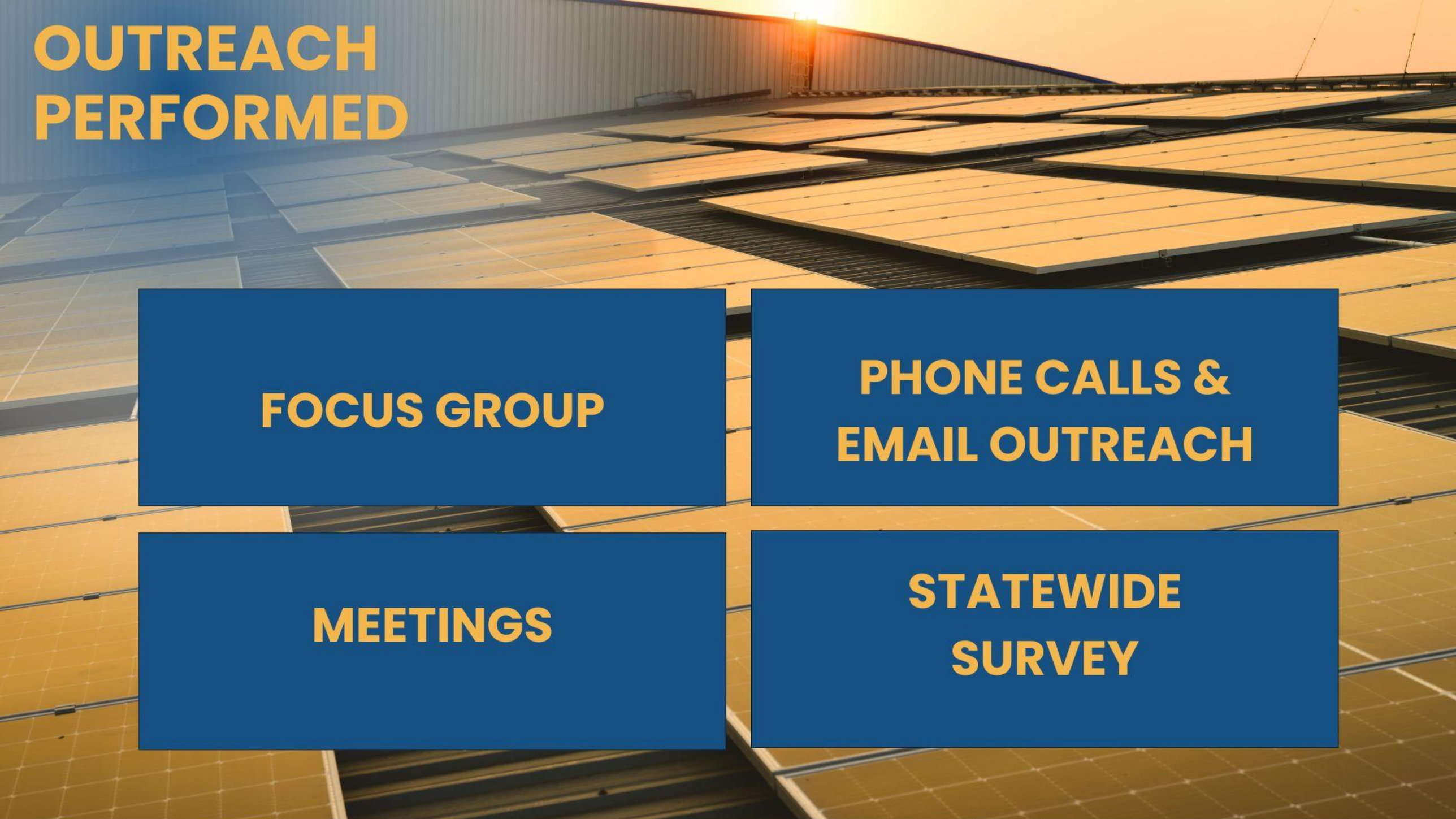
WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF SOLAR?

- **Cost savings and increased revenue** for local communities from repurposed energy dollars. Solar is cheaper than conventional energy and rates are fixed over 25-30 years. Solar protects communities from price gouging and market volatility.

- **Safety, security, and resiliency** through the creation of emergency cooling centers that maintain power when there are blackouts, brownouts, storms and wildfires.

- **Reduced carbon emissions** to support community health and help address climate change.

OUTREACH PERFORMED



FOCUS GROUP

PHONE CALLS & EMAIL OUTREACH

MEETINGS

STATEWIDE SURVEY

KEY FINDINGS

Read more of the survey at: bit.ly/nm_solar_poll

There is widespread support for renewable energy among New Mexico voters

01 | Over 70% of New Mexico support the use of both solar and wind energy sources

02 | Three in four voters agree that the state should maximize its renewable energy production

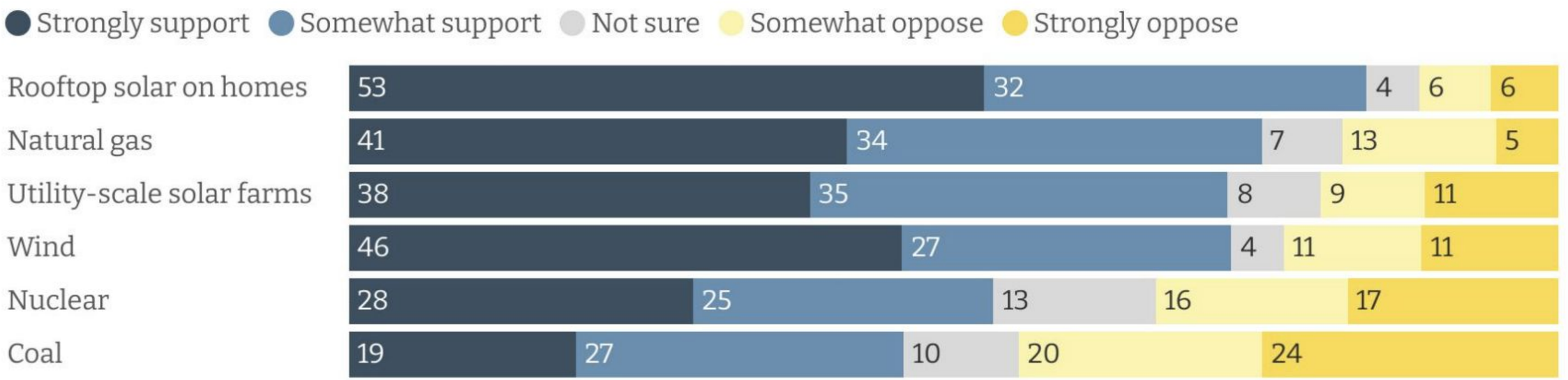
03 | Nearly half of voters who do not already have rooftop solar would join a community solar program if it was available to them while ~30% are ‘not sure’

04 | A majority of voters support the creation of a state solar fund to help local governments plan and build public solar projects

Support for renewable energy sources far outweighs opposition among New Mexico voters

Support for Electricity Sources

EMBOLD research

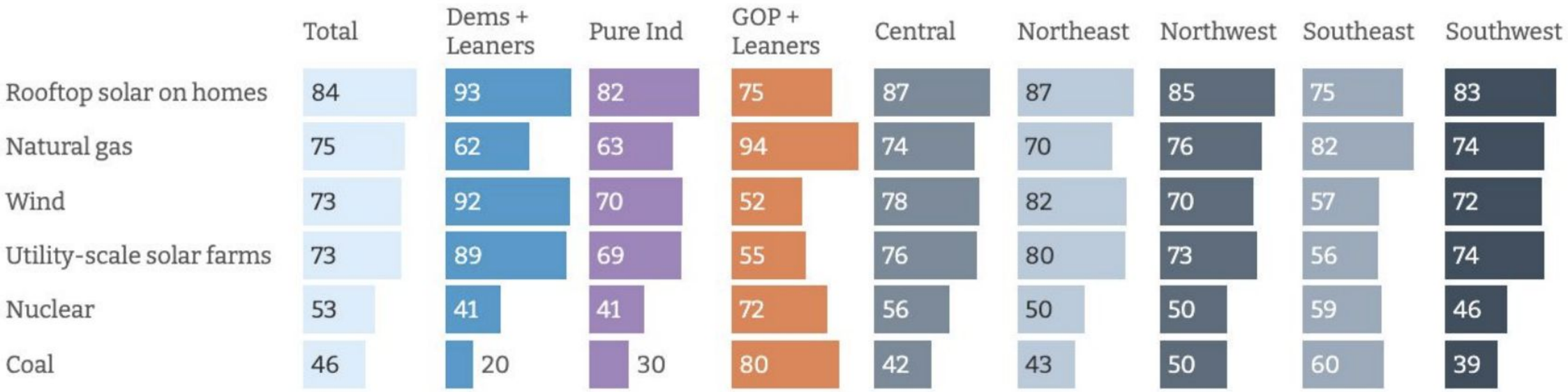


Q: Do you support or oppose the following types of electricity generation in New Mexico?

A majority of New Mexico voters support renewable energy sources, regardless of partisanship

Support for Electricity Sources

Numbers below represent total support.



Q: Do you support or oppose the following types of electricity generation in New Mexico?

WHAT WE'RE HEARING FROM OUR COMMUNITIES

Highlights from our outreach:

- There is widespread support for the fund, with more than 50 endorsing organizations including Tribes, School Districts, Local Governments, their state associations, and intersectional NGOs

- A majority of the Tribes and Counties we connected with are planning to build solar projects that could be supported by the fund.

- Many School Districts and Municipalities would like to develop solar but need the kind of support that would be provided by the fund to do so

WHAT WE'RE HEARING FROM OUR COMMUNITIES

We also found that:

- New Mexico communities have important public safety and resilience needs such as power and shelter for residents and first responders during emergencies and disasters that this fund could support.

- Many Tribes, Counties, School Districts, and Municipalities have projects like this and would like to develop more because of the resilience, sustainability, and cost benefits they receive.

WHAT WE'RE HEARING FROM OUR COMMUNITIES

- Local and tribal governments can save up to $10 million after 25 years by investing in 1 MW of solar.

- Solar is more accessible and affordable than ever. Between 2009-2019, solar costs fell more than 90%, and these trends are likely to continue with increased manufacturing and investment.

Creating Resilience Hubs for Community Safety

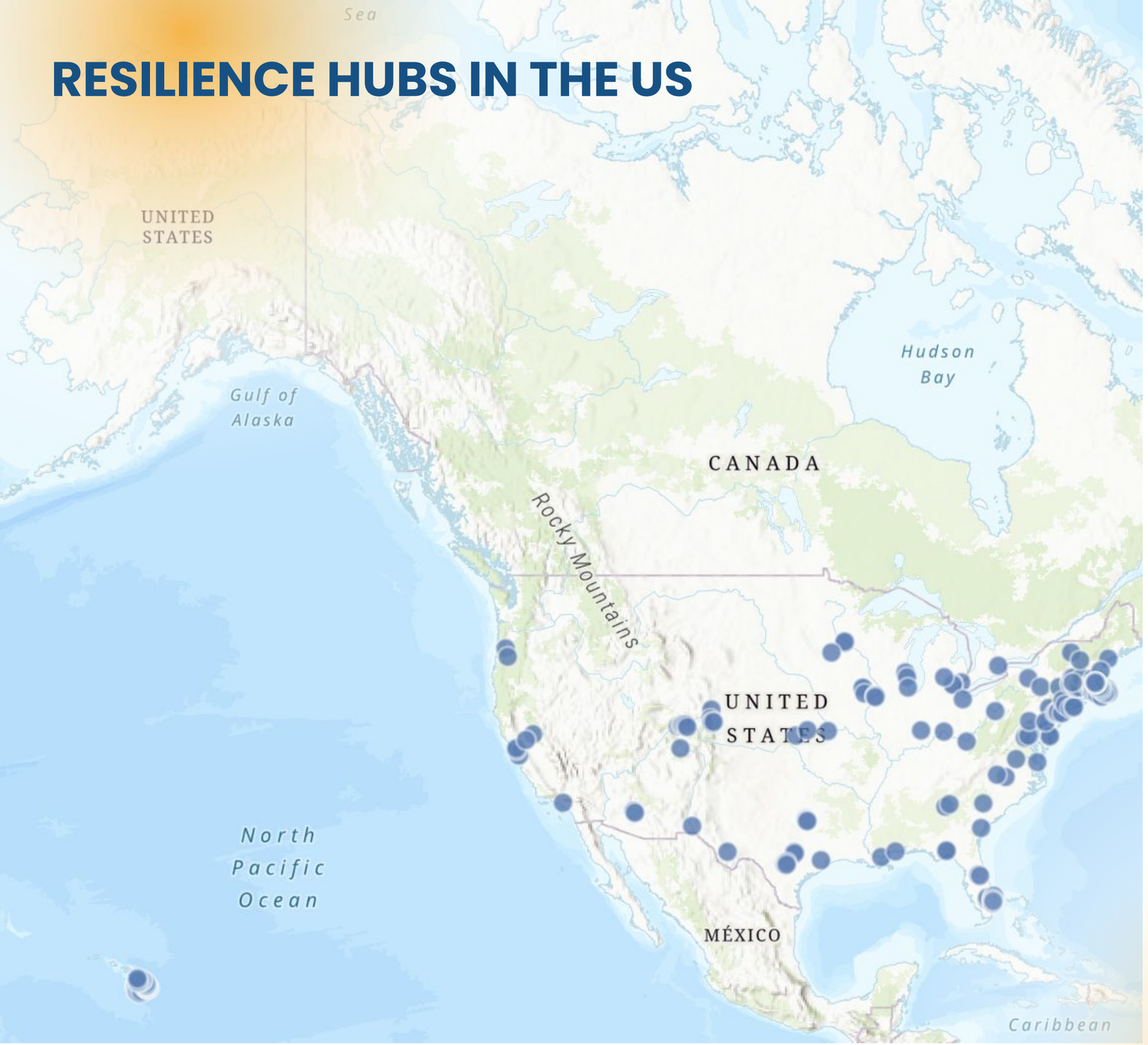
WHAT IS A RESILIENCE HUB?

A resilience hub is a lifeline that provides energy, food, water, and other necessities during power outages and emergencies.

Solar energy and battery storage are key components, assuring power is available to support critical needs, from running medical devices, to powering critical water and wastewater infrastructure, to heating and cooling community shelters, to preserving food and medication.

Resilience hubs help alleviate burdens on emergency responders and give communities the tools to bounce back faster.

RESILIENCE HUBS IN THE US



- The Department of Homeland Security supports and tracks Resilience Hubs across the U.S.
- 278 resilience hubs are listed in DHS' interactive Resilience Hub Finder
- The one listed in New Mexico is located in Las Cruces

A Climate Resistant Community Passed Two Hurricane Tests

On the west coast of Florida, a town built to weather hurricanes hosted more than 2,000 people during Hurricane Milton. Could communities like this help shape Florida's future?

A lakefront park in Babcock Ranch, a community built to withstand climate-driven storms, days after Hurricane Milton. Caitlin Ochs for The New York Times

By Austyn Gaffney

Oct. 15, 2024

As Hurricane Milton rushed ashore last Wednesday at least 2,000 Floridians found safe haven at Babcock Ranch, a community the size of Manhattan that opened in 2018 to withstand climate-driven storms.

Evacuees spread across two buildings designated as shelters by the Florida Division of Emergency Management: a K-12 school held about 400 people and a 40,000-square-foot sports facility housed about 1,600 more. Many fled from Fort Myers, a coastal city about 15 miles to the southwest, where residents were under a mandatory evacuation order.

"When Governor DeSantis made the announcement that Babcock Ranch was open we saw a very big surge in evacuees," said Syd Kitson, the town's co-founder who estimated that hundreds more evacuees sheltered in private homes of the town's roughly 10,000 residents. "It saved a lot of lives in some really dangerous areas."

All the structures at Babcock Ranch are built to withstand more than 150-mile-per-hour hurricane force winds, and its 150-megawatt solar farms and underground transmission system means the community rarely loses electricity. Roughly 90 percent of the property is preserved wetland that helps collect excess water and rarely floods. After Hurricane Milton, the town saw some downed trees and traffic lights, but they never lost power.

SOLAR & STORAGE SUCCESS STORIES DURING HURRICANES

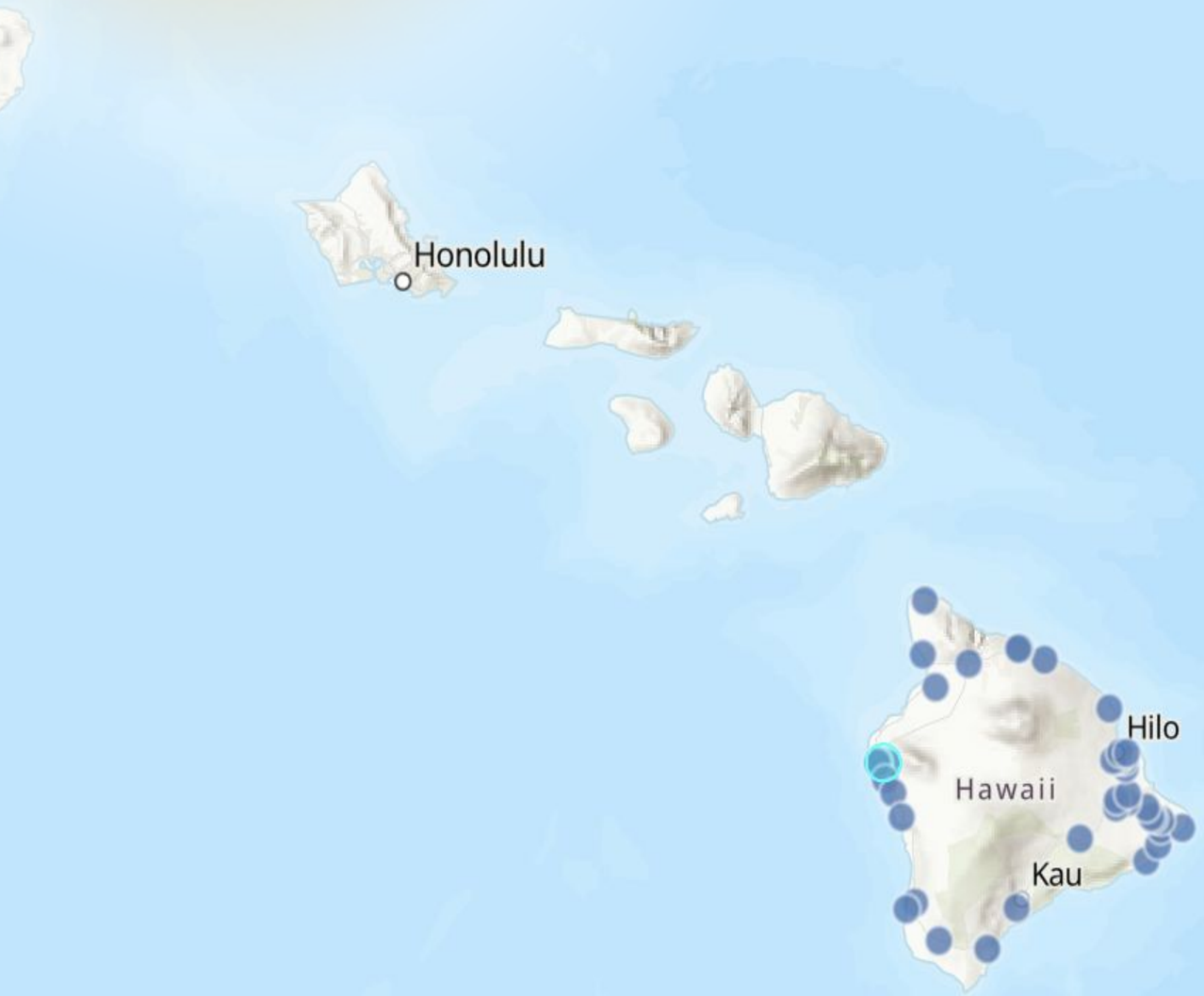
- **Hurricane Ian:** “America’s first solar-powered town” Babcock Ranch in Florida was the only community to keep their power, water, and internet in the county when the eye of Hurricane Ian, a near-Category 5 with 140 mph winds, passed directly over them. Their 150 MW solar plant with 10 MW of battery storage, spanning over 800 acres and powering 30,000 homes, kept the town resilient — along with other measures such as natural flow-ways for stormwater management, rain gardens to prevent flooding, and preserving two-thirds of the land for conservation with at least 75% native plants.

SOLAR & STORAGE SUCCESS STORIES DURING HURRICANES

- **Hurricane Sandy:** During Superstorm Sandy, a large solar installer in New Jersey reported minimal damage to their panels, even in the hardest hit areas, proving solar's durability against extreme weather conditions. Additionally, a school in the Garden State had a hybrid 232 kW solar system with supplementary diesel generators that was designed to operate independently of the grid. The facility manager explained, "Without our solar system on the roof of the school, we would have needed even more fuel, which would have been difficult to find because it was needed for all the repair trucks operating around the state."

- **Hurricane Florence:** Damage and flooding caused some fossil fuel and nuclear plants in North Carolina to be shut down for weeks, yet Duke Energy's solar panels were up and running only one day after the storm. A projects director at the Rocky Mountain Institute commented, "Solar is resilient — there are a ton of cases where, as long as the roof stays attached, the solar array stays attached as well."

RESILIENCE HUBS TO SUPPORT WILDFIRE SAFETY

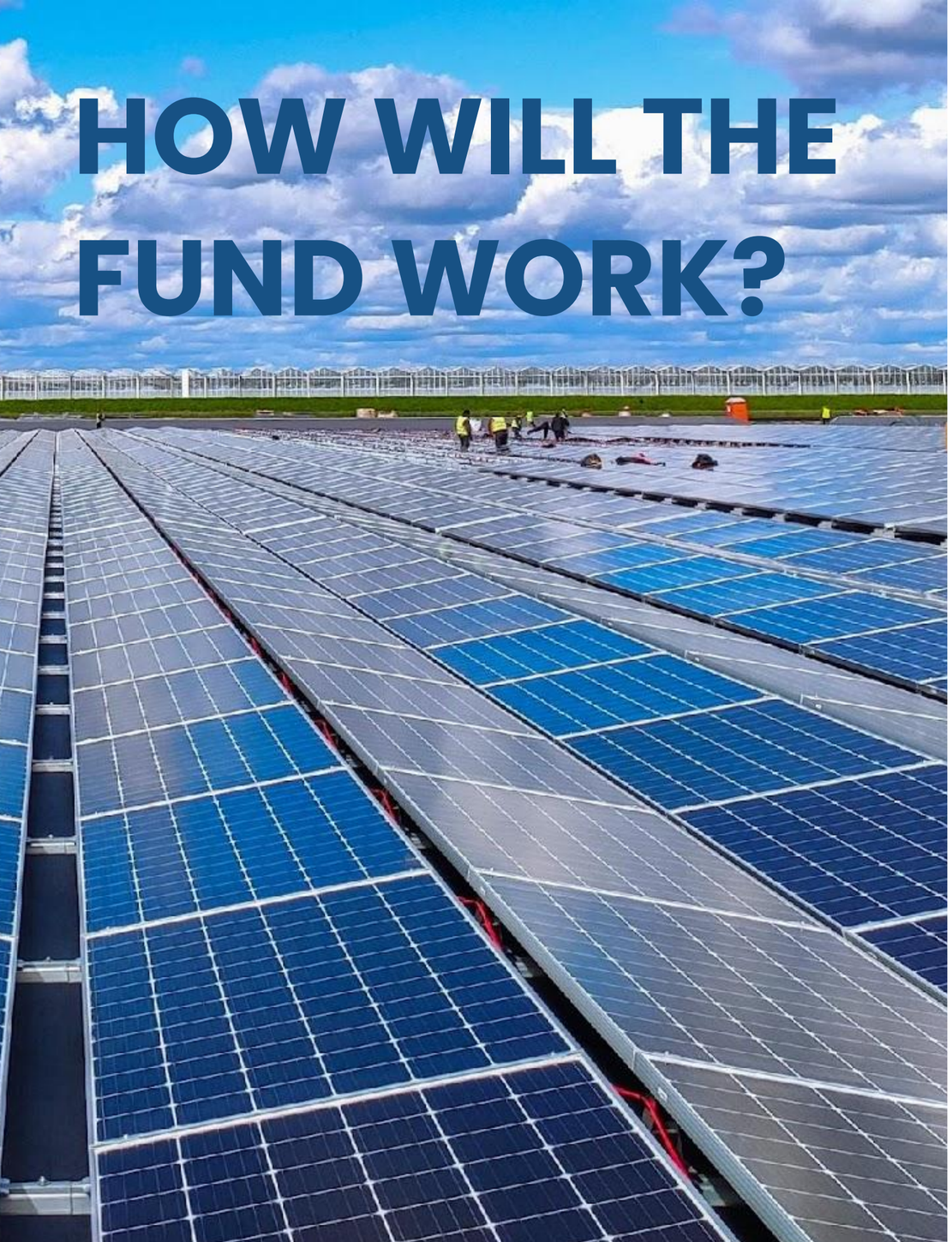


- **Hawaii** has 40 resilience hubs and is developing more to provide needed resources year-round, as well as coordinate emergency and recovery responses and provide power, shelter, and essential community needs in times of emergency.

RESILIENCE HUBS TO SUPPORT WILDFIRE SAFETY

- **Oregon:** After a series of devastating fires, this year six Oregon communities received federal funding to develop resilience hubs to protect and serve their communities during future fire emergencies. Each hub will provide resources and programming to benefit community members year-round and will provide additional support to residents during emergencies such as wildfires, smoke, or heat waves. The six facilities chosen to become hubs include the Senior and Activities Center in Florence, the Fern Ridge Service Center in Veneta, the Fairfield Elementary School Gym in Eugene, the Bob Keefer Center in Springfield, the Willamette Activity Center in Oakridge, and the Community Center and Library in Cottage Grove. The hubs will also be stocked with supplies for emergencies, and United Way will be collaborating with Lane County's Public Health Reserve Corp to recruit, train, and activate long-term volunteers in each community when disasters arise. The hubs will help coordinate emergency management mechanisms to ensure swift and cohesive disaster response.

HOW WILL THE FUND WORK?



The fund will be structured to prioritize funding projects that:

- benefit rural communities
- serve communities that wouldn't be able access solar and storage without this funding
- make essential community buildings and infrastructure resilient
- have significant long-term operating cost reductions
- support workforce development
- are geographically diverse and disbursed

HOW WILL THE FUND WORK?

A Tribal Administrator wants to to solarize their water treatment facilities to lower expensive utility bills and ensure that their infrastructure is resilient. With passage of this bill they could hire technical expertise to plan a solar and storage project to power their wells and water treatment infrastructure, as well as grant writers and funding experts to acquire funding and financing for the project. They could get financing from the Climate Investment Center, a Rural Energy for America grant from the USDA which requires a 50% match, a 50% match from the New Mexico Match Fund, and then after completion could apply for an Inflation Reduction Act cash subsidy that could cover 30-50% of the total project costs that were financed.

HOW WILL THE FUND WORK?

A City Council is reviewing the budget and finds itself short $100,000 for critical elder care programs. Utility bills for city facilities have been growing substantially each year and eating into every department's budget. Someone suggests adding solar panels to reduce these costs. Where would you even start the planning or funding with no room in the budget to hire that kind of expertise?

The Local Solar Access fund would help them hire experts to plan and fund solar projects that will save energy dollars and power critical facilities.

WHY NOW?

Communities throughout our state want to build solar projects that will save money, make them safer and more resilient, especially in emergencies, and reduce dangerous climate emissions. However, most local and Tribal governments do not have the capital to build these projects, nor the staff to access federal grants.

New Mexico has unprecedented, but temporary, budget surpluses from oil and gas revenue. And there are **time-sensitive federal funding opportunities** on the table that we are at risk of missing out on if our communities can't access grant writers and technical expertise.

The fund will help communities overcome obstacles to build the solar they need, investing in their future for decades to come.

LEARN MORE AND STAY IN TOUCH AT PUBLICPOWERNM.ORG

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