



ENERGY ACTION NETWORK TOOLKIT



PARTNERS IN ENERGY
An Xcel Energy Community Collaboration

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Xcel Energy Partners in Energy and the Role of Toolkits

Xcel Energy Partners in Energy provides communities in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Colorado services to develop and implement an energy or electric vehicle action plan. Every community has its own unique energy needs and priorities, and Partners in Energy tailors its services to complement each community's vision. As part of this offering, we have developed several toolkits to help communities reach their energy goals. You can explore all available toolkits on the [Partners in Energy Portal](#). To customize any of the resources with your community's unique brand identity, contact your Partners in Energy facilitator.

Using This Toolkit

Energy action networks can be powerful vehicles for building relationships, sharing knowledge, coordinating action, and advancing shared goals. This toolkit provides practical guidance including how to:

- Develop and facilitate effective networks
- Understand different types of energy-focused networks and how they function
- Identify appropriate structures and approaches based on network purpose
- Foster meaningful collaboration across sectors and geographies
- Sustain momentum and maximize the collective impact of energy initiatives

It highlights key principles, practical tools, and real-world examples to efficiently and effectively direct the reader to understand networks and put them into practice. Whether initiating a new effort or strengthening an existing one, this resource supports the use of network-based strategies to advance equitable, coordinated, and lasting energy action.

Xcel Energy assumes no liability during project implementation. This toolkit is only intended to provide information and general resources. It is not a substitute for conducting localized research and developing specific plans tailored toward individual communities' needs.

Who Should Use This Toolkit

This toolkit is for individuals, organizations, and communities interested in forming, facilitating, participating, or managing networks to accelerate energy action.



Glossary of Terms

Advocacy: Mobilizes diverse organizations and individuals to amplify their voices, influence policy decisions, and drive systemic change through collective advocacy efforts.

Boulder County Regional EV Collaboration Cohort: A strategic alliance formed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through equitable transportation electrification in Boulder County.

Collaborative Intent: A collective desire to achieve more through cooperation than any individual or organization could alone.

Collective Impact: A structured approach to collaboration that aims to achieve significant social or environmental change through coordinated efforts across sectors.

Conflicts of Interest: A conflict between the private interests and the official responsibilities of a person in a position of trust.

Coordinated Action: Unites stakeholders around shared goals to align messaging, pool resources, coordinate initiatives, and implement policies and projects in a cohesive and strategic way.

Decentralized Structure: A non-hierarchical organization model where leadership and decision-making are distributed rather than controlled by a single entity.

Dynamic Energy Landscape: Constantly evolving technologies, policies, and funding opportunities require networks to stay flexible and up to date.

Ecosystem: Collection of multiple individuals or organizations, that are interconnected and/or perform work within the same space.

Energy Action Network: An alliance of people and organizations working together to accelerate the transition to a clean, equitable energy future.

Mission Synergy: Aligned or complementary missions across organizations.

Network: A group of people, organizations, or communities connected by shared goals, interests, or values, working collaboratively to support learning and action.

Peer Learning / Information Exchange: Brings together like-minded individuals or organizations to share experiences, lessons learned, and best practices to accelerate collective knowledge.

Relationship Building: Connects related fields and organizations to strengthen partnerships, reduce duplication, and enhance the efficiency and value of coordinated service delivery.

Resource Constraints: Time or financial resources can limit the effectiveness of a network if not appropriately managed or prioritized as a part of organizational work.

Scope: The generally understood boundaries of the work, and the type of work that the network will support.

Sphere of Influence: All activities within the network's control.

SWOT Analysis: A strategic planning tool used to identify and evaluate an organization or project's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.

ENERGY ACTION NETWORK CONTEXT



What is a Network?

A network is a group of people, organizations, or communities connected by shared goals, interests, or values. It can bring together a range of resources, skills, relationships, and knowledge to support collaboration, learning, and action across different contexts.

What Are Energy Action Networks?

An energy action network is an alliance of people, organizations, and institutions working together to accelerate the transition to a clean, equitable energy future. Whether it's sharing knowledge, aligning strategies, or coordinating bold action, these networks break down silos and amplify impact—faster, smarter, and together.

Networks are distinct from traditional stakeholder teams or working groups. Rather than operating through a single lead organization or top-down structure, networks are more fluid, collaborative, and decentralized. They are characterized by the following features:

- **Decentralized Structure:** No single central decision-maker; leadership and decision-making are often collaborative.
- **Organizational Diversity:** Involves different organizations or stakeholders with unique roles, perspectives, and strengths.
- **Shared “Ecosystem”:** Typically, different organizations are operating within the same “ecosystem” (e.g., group of educational institutions, communities in a region, different components of a workforce development program).
- **Mission Synergy:** Participating organizations have aligned or complementary missions and are anchored in a common goal or set of outcomes.
- **Collaborative Intent:** Organizations are driven by a shared desire to achieve more through joint effort than any one organization could accomplish alone.

Why Leverage Energy Action Networks

In today's complex ecosystems, where policy, technology, and funding landscapes are constantly evolving, leveraging a network has become essential. Networks enable diverse stakeholders to navigate these rapid changes collaboratively, align strategies, share resources, and respond more effectively than any single organization could on its own.

The following are key advantages of taking a network-based approach to advancing energy action:

- **Increased Collective Impact:** Combines the strengths, reach, and resources of multiple organizations to achieve broader and more meaningful outcomes.
- **Shared Learning and Innovation:** Creates space for peer learning, experimentation, and shared best practices and new ideas.
- **Mutual Benefit:** Built on reciprocal value; members contribute knowledge, expertise, or resources and receive support in return. Fosters relationships across disciplines or sectors, unlocking innovation and more holistic problem-solving.
- **Reduced Duplication:** Collaboration can reduce duplicative efforts by aligning work across organizations and filling gaps more strategically.
- **Flexible Participation:** Allows members to engage at varying levels depending on capacity, interest, and alignment with network goals.
- **Pooled Resources:** Sharing resources between multiple groups.
- **Increased Visibility and Influence:** Creating communications platforms to promote the network.

Networks come in many shapes and sizes, each tailored to serve distinct purposes based on their goals, participants, and context (See Table 1). Understanding the different types of networks and the roles they can play in advancing energy action, such as knowledge sharing, relationship building, idea generation, coordination, and policy influence, is essential for leveraging their full potential. These networks can also vary in terms of structural formality, ranging from informal alliances to formalized legal entities or nonprofit organizations. In developing or strengthening a network, it is equally important to identify and understand existing networks in the landscape, as well as how they interact with or complement your own, to maximize collaboration and impact.

Table 1. Common Types of Networks

Common Types of Networks	Definition	Examples
Peer Learning / Information Exchange	Brings together like-minded individuals or organizations to share experiences, lessons learned, and best practices to accelerate collective knowledge.	• Partners in Energy Network • American Council for Energy-Efficient Economy
Relationship Building	Connects related fields and organizations to strengthen partnerships, reduce duplication, and enhance the efficiency and value of coordinated service delivery.	• Partners in Energy Network • Electrification Workforce Network • Building Decarbonization Network • National Energy & Utility Affordability Coalition
Coordinated Action	Unites stakeholders around shared goals to align messaging, pool resources, coordinate initiatives, and implement policies and projects in a cohesive and strategic way.	• Partners in Energy Network • Front Range Beneficial Electrification Network (FRBEN) • Clean Energy Research Teams
Advocacy	Mobilizes diverse organizations and individuals to amplify their voices, influence policy decisions, and drive systemic change through collective efforts.	• Boulder County Electric Vehicle Collaboration Cohort • Colorado Communities for Climate Action • American Council for Energy-Efficient Economy • National Energy & Utility Affordability Coalition

Energy Action Network Challenges

While networks offer powerful advantages, they also come with unique complexities. [Table 2](#) outlines common challenges that can arise when working in a networked structure, and the key sections in this toolkit that provide tips for addressing these challenges.

Table 2. Common Types of Challenges

Challenge	Description	Relevant Toolkit Section
Diverse Organizational Goals	Participating organizations may have different missions, priorities, or timelines, making it challenging to find common ground.	Step 1: Identify the Problem
Identifying the Right Participants	It can be difficult to engage both decision-makers and on-the-ground implementers who are critical to network success.	Step 2: Conduct Foundational Work
Dynamic Energy Landscape	Constantly evolving technologies, policies, and funding opportunities require networks to stay flexible and up to date.	Step 2: Conduct Foundational Work Step 7: Monitor Progress and Report Out
Lack of Central Decision-Maker	Without a clear authority structure, decision-making can be slower or more ambiguous, requiring intentional processes to build alignment.	Step 3: Define the Network Structure
Conflicts of Interest	Network participants may face real or perceived conflicts of interest between the work of the network and the work of their organization.	Step 3: Define the Network Structure
Varying Communication Styles	Differences in language, protocols, or internal processes can hinder coordination and mutual understanding.	Step 3: Define the Network Structure
Resource Constraints	Time or financial resources can limit the effectiveness of a network if not appropriately managed or prioritized as a part of organizational work.	Step 3: Define the Network Structure Step 5: Create a Work Plan

Partners in Energy and Networks

Forming and managing an effective energy action network takes time, coordination, and the right expertise. Partners in Energy can provide guidance, tools, and facilitation services tailored to each network's needs. Specifically, Partners in Energy can provide:

- **Landscape assessment:** Support in identifying existing key players, systems, and relationships to consider before establishing a new network.
- **Network formation support:** Assistance in identifying and recruiting diverse stakeholders who can bring critical perspectives, resources, and influence to the network.
- **Governance structure development:** Guidance on building effective governance through tools like charters, memoranda of understanding (MOUs), and collaborative work plans.
- **Goal setting and metrics:** Help with analyzing data, establishing baselines, and creating meaningful metrics to track progress and demonstrate impact.
- **Work plan development:** Facilitation to determine key strategies and partnerships and documentation of the work plan to help the network make meaningful progress toward its clean energy and equity goals.
- **Network management:** Ongoing coordination to keep the network organized and on track, including setting meeting agendas, hosting and documenting meetings, and ensuring follow-through on action items.
- **Facilitation:** Skilled facilitation to ensure meetings are inclusive, productive, and aligned with network objectives.
- **Project implementation support:** Provide hands-on support through event coordination, webinar facilitation, research and analysis, as well as comprehensive marketing and outreach efforts.
- **Reporting and communications:** Assistance with developing communication materials and reporting progress to stakeholders and the broader community.

If your organization is interested in forming or strengthening an energy action network, we encourage you to connect with a Partners in Energy community facilitator. They can walk you through available support and help you explore relevant examples. You can also refer to the [Energy Action Network Case Studies](#) included at the end of this toolkit for inspiration and insights.



ROADMAP

TO MAXIMIZE THE SUCCESS AND IMPACT OF ENERGY ACTION NETWORKS



The following section serves as a **roadmap** for building, sustaining, and strengthening energy action networks (Figure 1). These strategies are not necessarily linear—they are **iterative** and can be revisited as the network evolves. For example, stakeholder identification may need to be refined as new gaps or opportunities emerge, and goals may shift based on changing conditions or new insights.

Networks may begin at different points along this roadmap depending on the work already completed. Some may be in the early stages of defining a problem, while others may already have a work plan and are focused on managing or refining operations. Wherever a network starts, these strategies are designed to provide structure, clarity, and direction to maximize collective impact.

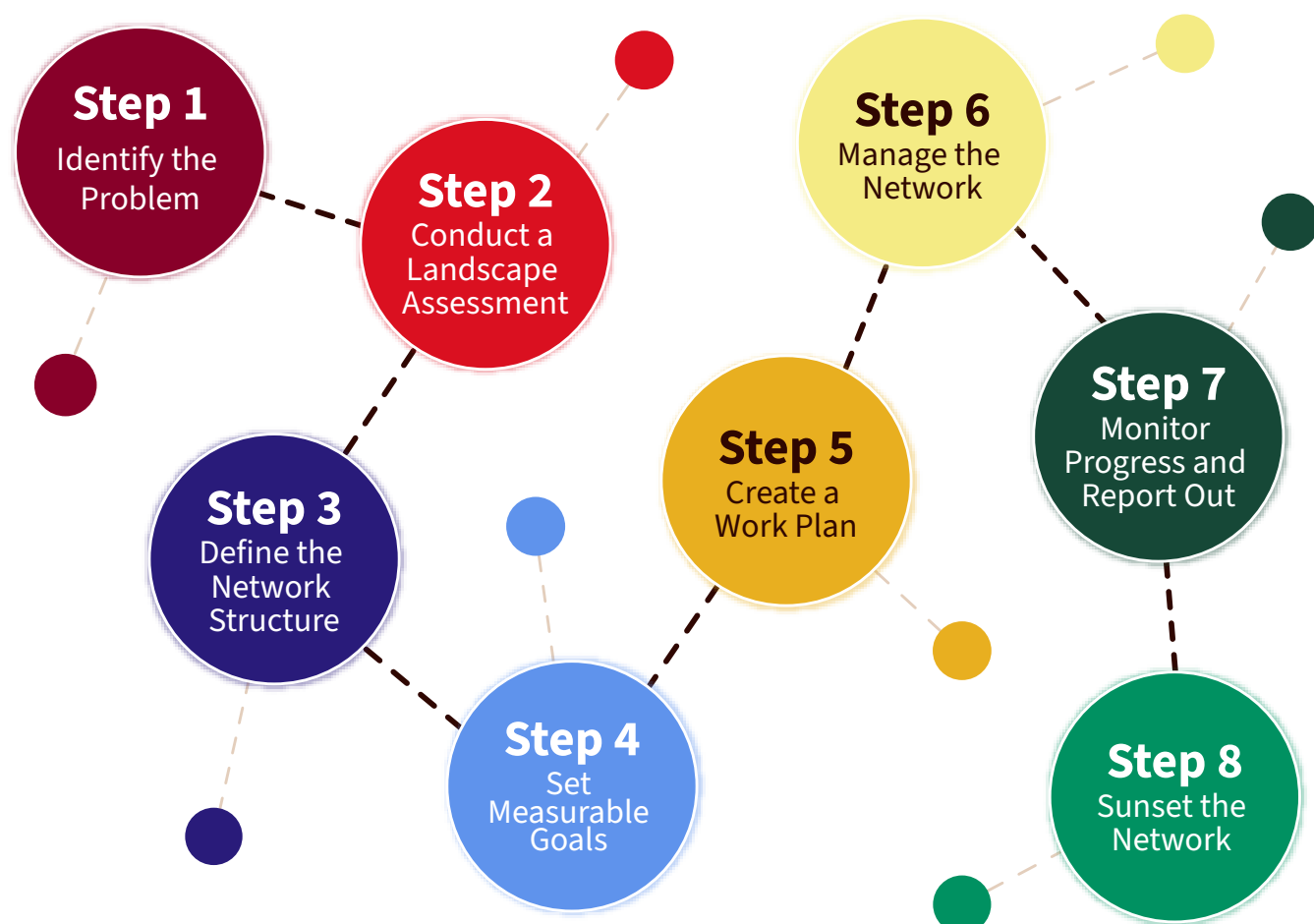


Figure 1. Overview of the iterative roadmap.

Step 1: Identify the Problem

The first step in the creation of any energy action network is to clearly define the problem or issue that brings organizations together. The problem must lend itself to being addressed by a collection of like-minded organizations that can achieve noticeable progress in a set period of time. This discussion will set the tone for the lifespan of the network.

Clearly define the problem that will be addressed by a network

Identify the problem the network will solve. Consider the value a network will bring to address the problem (e.g., pooling resources, connecting siloed organizations in a complex ecosystem).

Identify the “purpose” of the network

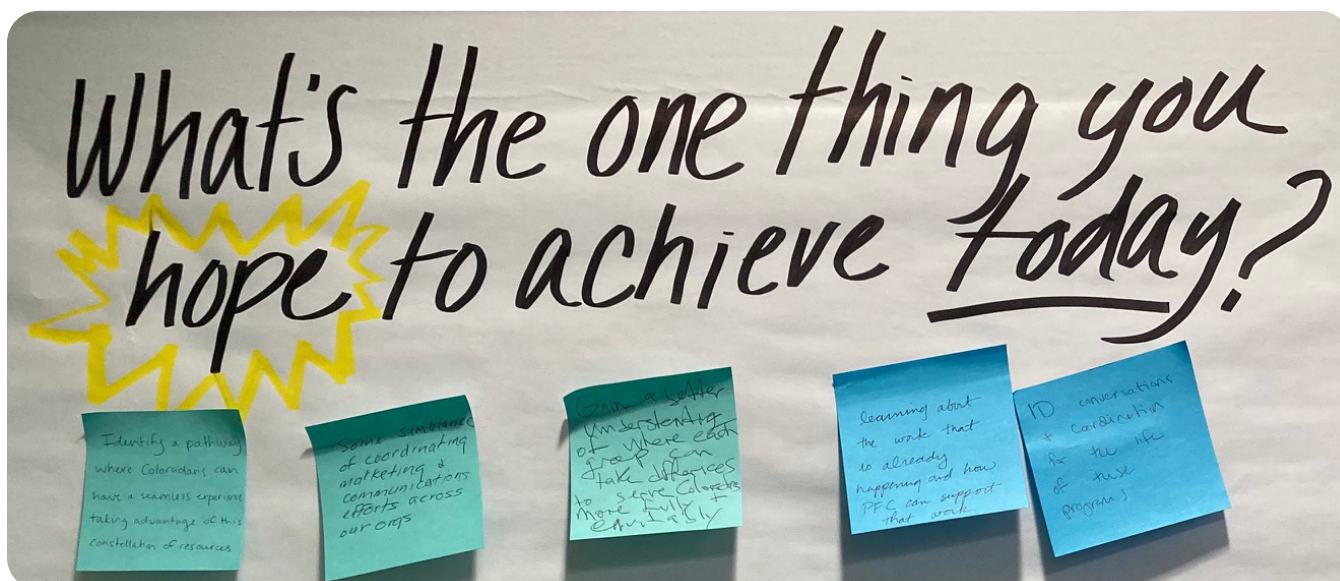
Based on the identified problem, and the identified value of leveraging a network to address the problem, establish a clear purpose statement for the network. The purpose statement will serve to rally future participants around a common mission and should answer the general question “why does this network exist?”. This purpose statement may be used to help recruit participants in [Step 2](#).

✓ EXAMPLE

The Electrification Workforce Network (EWN) was formed to address a critical gap in the clean energy transition: the disconnect among workforce development stakeholders. For job seekers, the pathway into electrification careers can be unclear and fragmented, as various organizations control different steps in the process without strong coordination. The EWN acts as the “glue”, helping align stakeholders, clarify pathways, and improve accessibility for workers, especially from disadvantaged communities.

💡 TIP

Understand where there is and isn't alignment among the missions of the participating organizations. Being upfront about the alignment, or lack of, will reduce misunderstandings and strengthen connections among individuals.



Step 2: Conduct Foundational Work

Once participants have determined that creating a network is the ideal solution, discuss the foundational elements of the network. Some of these topics lend themselves to group exploration; others will require some research to gather background information.

Perform a landscape assessment

Conduct research to better understand your problem and determine whether work on the topic is already being done by another organization or network. Clarify the following:

- Who are the key players working on the topic and what are their roles?
- How do their objectives, goals, and target audience align with yours?
- Are the key players already interacting on other related topics?
- Are there gaps that existing networks are not filling?
- Do we have enough existing information to fully understand the problem we are trying to solve?

Based on the findings of the landscape assessment, determine whether to establish a new network or join, expand, or enliven an existing network.



PARTNERS IN ENERGY

Partners in Energy can help conduct a landscape assessment and make recommendations about how to leverage existing networks or organizations operating within the space of interest.

Define the bounds of your network

Defining the bounds of a network is a critical early step to ensure clarity, focus, and effective collaboration. This includes identifying **the geographic scope** (e.g., city, county, region) of the network and the **types of organizations or roles involved** (e.g., policymakers, utilities, workforce developers, vendors). Clear boundaries help avoid mission drift, ensure the right people are at the table, and support decision-making that aligns with the network's purpose. While networks may evolve over time, setting initial parameters around who participates and what topics are covered provides a strong foundation for coordinated action.



EXAMPLE

The Front Range Beneficial Electrification Network (FRBEN) is a regional network of local governments focused on advancing heat pump adoption in the Front Range. The network started as a grassroots effort based on interest from a few local governments in the Denver Metro Area. The group grew rapidly and quickly realized the importance of clarifying the geographic and organizational “scope” of the network. Facilitated by Partners in Energy, the network agreed to focus on connecting local governments (versus including other organizations like vendors or workforce organizations) along the Front Range of Colorado, with an interest in beneficial electrification. By defining clear boundaries, the network has been able to focus on the role of local government collaboration to create alignment across building policy, workforce development, messaging and outreach, and funding opportunities.

Identify the appropriate network participants

Based on the bounds of the network, refine the key organizations and players that were brainstormed as part of the landscape assessment. The skillsets of the participants will play a large role in the effectiveness of the network. Consider who will be most effective at advancing the objective of the network (e.g., decision makers, managers, implementors, researchers, experienced staff). Strive to secure representation from all key organizations in this space.



TIP

Consider the ideal size of the network. While large networks can be difficult to manage, small networks can be ineffectual. An optimal size for the network should be discussed among the participants. Large networks may benefit from splitting into smaller subgroups to maintain focus and momentum.

Recruit members

As a network is established, use the following guidelines for building and recruiting new members:

- Develop recruitment information that clearly outlines membership requirements, benefits and expectations. Participation may vary amongst members based on their capacity, influence, or other factors.
- Contact prospective members and invite them to participate.
- Establish a membership roster to track who has been invited to the network, who is actively involved, and who could be involved in the future.
- Establish roles based on which members are important collaborators, versus members who may be periodically consulted or informed.
- For parties who are interested in the network but would not be a good fit based on the network boundaries, determine how to communicate that they're not eligible for membership.



EXAMPLE

The Electrification Workforce Network was formed initially through strong personal connections, helping to create a culture of enthusiasm, trust, and buy-in. Another major driver of the EWN's success is the strong alignment between the work of the network and the work of the participating organizations. Finding alignment with participant's paid jobs can help keep motivation and momentum high. Rather than "adding" to someone's plate, the network can serve to accomplish both individual and collective goals.



PARTNERS IN ENERGY

Partners in Energy can help recruit members to the network by drafting invitation language, establishing a stakeholder tracking system, and even reaching out to potential members.

Consider how the presence of the network will be established

Branding and naming are very important for new organizations. Succinct network names and a brand help announce the network's presence to the larger community. Both help clarify the purpose of the network to members, future members and outside organizations.



PARTNERS IN ENERGY

Partners in Energy can help create a cohesive brand to represent new networks.

Step 3: Define the Network Structure

To be successful, a network must establish clear governance and operational protocols. Documenting the roles and responsibilities of the network, setting expectations for collaboration and communication, and setting up collaborative workspaces will provide needed structure and expectations for the participants.

Identify the type of network that will be built

Networks come in many forms and styles. The participants need to select the type that best works for them as well as the type that best handles the problem identified. The participants should clearly state the type of network that will be launched (see [Table 1](#) and the role it will play in resolving the identified problem. Some networks are loose collections of individuals who gather to exchange information. Others are more formal with expectations for the accomplishment of specific goals and targets. It's important to be upfront with members about the network's purpose and role.

Select the format of the network

Based on the needs and preferences of participants, determine if the meeting format will operate entirely virtually, entirely in-person, or as a hybrid model.

- Virtual meetings offer flexibility, reduced travel time, and allow for broader participation across geographic areas.
- In-person meetings support stronger relationship-building, collaboration, and engagement through face-to-face interaction.
- Hybrid models combine the accessibility of virtual meetings with the connection-building benefits of in-person gatherings.

Decide how long the network will live

If the network has a goal with a defined completion date, the duration of the network is already established. If there is not a defined completion date, then the overall goals of the network would drive the duration of the work. Standing up a new program or establishing one-off projects implies a shorter lifespan than creating a permanent space for cross pollination and information sharing.

If there is a sunset date for the network, how will the network shut down? Consideration should be given to declaring and celebrating “victory”. Also, the network should determine what will happen to the documentation (e.g., notes, white papers, plans, etc.) that was assembled during the network's lifespan (reference [Step 4: Set Measurable Goals](#), [Step 7: Monitor Progress and Report Out](#), and [Step 8: Sunset the Network](#)).



Determine the best organizational “home” for the network

Energy action networks are naturally decentralized, which allows for broad collaboration but can make coordination challenging. To maintain momentum and clarity, it’s important to establish an “organizational home” for the network. This could be a lead organization that manages communications and funding, a shared platform for document storage, or a third-party project manager to support coordination. The right solution depends on the network’s structure and needs, but having a clear home helps to ensure consistent progress, clear roles, and effective collaboration.

EXAMPLE

The Building Decarbonization Network brings together five major organizations (1) Xcel Energy (XE), (2) Colorado Energy Office (CEO), (3) Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG), (4) Rewiring America, and the (5) Collective Clean Energy Fund (CCEF). The network was formed in response to the influx of funding each group received to support building decarbonization in Colorado, which created an incentive to coordinate programs and avoid duplication. At its core, the network aims to improve the customer experience for both market-rate and income-qualified households. Partners in Energy acts as the “organizational home”, serving as a convener for the five organizations. To support collaboration, Partners in Energy set up a shared digital workspace (via Microsoft Teams) and maintains regular communication through biweekly emails and monthly project management meetings.

Clarify roles and responsibilities of various network members and their organizations

Members of the network could have different roles and responsibilities. Identifying who does what and the resources each member brings to the table will assist later in the effort to assign tasks and determine how the work will be completed.

- Are there different levels of membership? What level of resource commitment is expected?
- Are there members who will specialize in one or more areas (e.g., communications, grant writing)?
- Are working subgroups needed? If so, clarify their role and how will they be formed and maintained?

Align on decision-making and meeting protocols

Establishing protocols for decision-making will reduce confusion during meetings and create expectations for how the network will function. The following items should be discussed and agreed upon by members.

- How often will you meet?
- How long will meetings last?
- Who is in charge of organizing the group?
- Who is facilitating the conversation, and who will take and share notes?
- Is an in-person, virtual or hybrid network?
- Does the group work on consensus?
- Will participants vote on any issues?
- How many members are needed for a quorum?
- Will decisions be documented?

Clarify communication protocols

Establishing communication protocols for internal and external communications will support internal operations and external impact of the network. Consider the following prompts to define network communication protocols.

- Who are the key points of contact in the network? For example, who is in the lead on communications and who is supporting?
- Are some members involved in decision making and are others just informed?
- How will you communicate with members and others outside the network? What is the expected frequency of communications?
- Consider creating a communications and engagement plan to broadcast the network's activities to a larger audience.
- Consider creating a communications platform (e.g., website, newsletter) to communicate with network members and a variety of partners.

Create a vision defining what the network hopes to achieve

The vision acts as the “North Star” of the network and guides the development of a detailed work plan (see [Step 5: Create a Work Plan](#)). The vision can maintain the status quo, be ambitious or even be aspirational. Above all, it serves to set the direction for the network. The vision should reiterate or build on the purpose of the network and should reflect an ideal outcome or future informed by the work of the network.

Establish a written charter/commitment to action for the network

An effective charter should capture the network's vision and establish the framework for collaboration across the network. A charter reiterates the objective of the network, clarifies roles and responsibilities of the network participants, establishes project management expectations, and establishes decision-making protocols. Given the decentralized nature of a network, clarifying how decisions will be made and what will be done when there isn't agreement or alignment on goals/objectives is critical. For instance, the charter may outline whether the group needs unanimous agreement, consensus, or some other decision-making structure will guide the group at key junctures. The charter may also define set periods for reevaluating terms of the charter. A charter is not the same as a work plan (see [Step 5: Create a Work Plan](#)).

EXAMPLE

Reference the full [Front Range Beneficial Electrification Charter](#).

TIP

By definition, networks are typically decentralized without a clear decision-maker or project manager. Participants may have other work commitments and may even work for organizations with different priorities than other network members. Plan accordingly by setting realistic goals, embracing shared leadership, and building in flexibility to adapt as the network evolves. Encourage participants to disclose any potential conflicts of interest at the outset of the work.

Step 4: Set Measurable Goals

Setting goals and measurable outcomes are key for keeping a network on track and to determine if the purpose of the network has been achieved. Goals help to motivate network members and can also help in recruiting new members and engaging external partners.

Establish one or more measurable goals to help evaluate success

A solid framework of goals helps to provide tangible goal posts to guide and motivate the work of the network. Goals can be qualitative or quantitative, but they must be relevant and measurable. A good option is to use the SMARTIE (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound, Inclusive and Equitable) goal setting framework referenced in Figure 2 to establish one or more goals.



Figure 2. Overview of the SMARTIE goal framework.

When identifying a metric for the goals, consider the following questions:

- Will your work have a meaningful impact on the metric? On what time scale?
- What data sources are available to measure the metric?
- How often are those data sources updated?

Consider selecting a metric for which data is readily available or reasonably developed. Use the data to establish a baseline and work together as a group to determine how ambitious you want your goal to be.

✓ EXAMPLE

The Boulder County Regional EV Collaboration Cohort was established to create a strategic plan aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions through equitable transportation electrification. With support from Xcel Energy's Partners in Energy, Boulder County developed an **Electric Vehicle (EV) Action Plan** that set a clear, measurable goal: install 2,380 public charging ports equitably distributed across the county, with a focus on multifamily and affordable housing locations. This well-defined objective played a key role in helping the County successfully secure grant funding to support EV charger installations on multifamily properties throughout the region.



TIP

Look for opportunities to align with the goals of other organizations (e.g., state government, utilities, etc.). Creating a supporting system of goals among a number of organizations can increase the horsepower available to achieve those goals.

Establish processes for tracking progress toward goals and reporting outcomes

Tracking results takes time and resources, however it is an important step to demonstrate the value of the network, and to inform course corrections. Members of the network will need to track down the data sources, collect the data, analyze the data and summarize the results. These roles and responsibilities should be identified to avoid confusion and to create a seamless system for communicating results on a regular basis. To determine how often you will track progress, consider:

1. What is the end goal and how much time is required by network members for tracking progress to meet this goal?
2. What is the expected timeframe for impacting this metric?

Reporting is just as important as tracking. Consider who needs to view the information (the full network, a subset of the network, a broader audience?). How will the information be delivered (as part of a meeting, in a published report, via social media?). Finally, identify the parties responsible for tracking and reporting. Tracking and reporting are essential for holding members accountable for conducting the work and achieving the desired vision (see [Step 7: Monitor Progress and Report Out](#)).



PARTNERS IN ENERGY

Partners in Energy can help identify useful metrics, facilitate goal setting discussions, and support tracking and reporting.



Step 5: Create a Work Plan

A work plan creates clear expectations for the specific work that will happen on the designated project timeline. A work plan can also clearly align resources, including staffing, with the stated goals and objectives of the network. The network should regularly revisit the work plan to determine if they are on track and also to make any necessary adjustments. The work plan should incorporate or reference the vision and goals established in [Step 4: Set Measurable Goals](#) as well as the charter from [Step 3: Define the Network Structure](#).

Identify the barriers and challenges to the group achieving its goals

Understand the strengths and weaknesses of the team. This can also be characterized as conducting a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis. Any barriers and challenges identified should be accompanied by an analysis of the solutions to those barriers. These solutions can build upon the strengths of the network members and opportunities that arise. This information should be used to help craft specific project elements that become part of the work plan.

Discuss the sphere of influence and scope of the network

The sphere of influence for any given network reflects what is within the network's control. The scope of a network reflects the generally understood boundaries of the work, and the type of work that the network will support. Understanding both sphere of influence and scope of work can help establish clear boundaries for the network and also helps avoid any requests for projects that have little relevancy to the ongoing work. For example, if the network is clearly focused on regional renewable energy work and a request is submitted to do electric vehicle work, members can identify the request as out of scope for the network.

Brainstorm potential projects and project subcomponents

Based on the information collected up to this point, start developing specific project ideas and any supporting components. Establish a desired timeline for the overall project and the project subcomponents. This timeline should include the final date of the project and intermediate steps along the way for each sub-component.

Determine the tools and resources available to accomplish the goals

Successful project implementation requires resources like staff time and funding. Once projects are identified, evaluate the resources available through the network. For instance can network members commit staff time, project funding, or other in-kind services? Identify any resource gaps that must be filled to advance the work and identify opportunities to fill those gaps through external partnerships or funding opportunities.



Create a work plan/action plan

Based on the above information, assemble all the relevant information into a document that aligns goals and objectives with the timeline and resources. This document should be shared with all members of the network and collectively approved.

✓ EXAMPLE

The Electrification Workforce Network (EWN) participants were initially not sure how to work together, or what collaborative projects would make sense to pursue. With support from Partners in Energy, the EWN developed a comprehensive work plan, outlining the network's two focus areas: 1) Diverse Representation of Electricians in the Denver Area and 2) Expanding the Network. The work plan included a list of potential initiatives the network could implement given the network's vision, scope, and resources. Having such a clear framework for collaboration has allowed the network to launch right into implementation. Within four months of implementation, the group successfully organized a collaborative resource fair for job seekers and two webinars for its members.

Select a timeframe for revisiting the work plan for adjustment

The network should identify the frequency for review of the work plan. The review can be done by a subgroup of the larger group and should then be shared with the entire network. If significant adjustments to the work plan are needed, they should be made in alignment with the decision-making processes established in the charter.

Step 6: Manage the Network

Managing the network is an essential and potentially time-consuming part of the work. Overseeing the network to ensure a smooth operation will help to reduce longer-term conflicts and keep the work on track. Management can either be done by the network project management team or an outside facilitator and can range from scheduling meetings, facilitating decision-making, and keeping the project on track.

Use the network and the work plan to begin the project tasks

Based on the internal and external resources identified in [Step 5: Create a Work Plan](#), secure and leverage resources.

- Follow-up with members to ensure that their staffing and resource commitments are occurring.
- Pursue external staffing and funding sources, including grants, free assistance or other potential resources.
- Identify funding, technical support, or other resources to sustain any long-term network activities.

Handle day-to-day operations

This work is key to helping the network run efficiently. Day-to-day operations can include a variety of tasks including:

- Meeting scheduling including scheduling rooms and food for in-person events
- Periodic email updates to members
- Taking and distributing meeting notes and other administrative tasks

Engage and support network members

Based on the selected network structure, consider the following ideas for engaging and supporting network members to maximize impact.

- Create space for networking outside of any formal meetings. This could be as simple as sharing member emails so that one-on-one follow-up on common topics of interest can occur.
- Determine if an outside facilitator is needed to help with member interactions. A facilitator can help with follow-up for specific tasks and help maintain contact among members.
- Engage members at the right pace by ensuring a steady frequency of engagement to avoid losing momentum and be mindful of excessive time commitments by members.
- Make the most of people's limited time. Meetings are where much of the work can take place, so focus on building agendas that maximize key decisions with clear assignments and set expectations regarding time commitments as early as possible.
- Determine how information will be shared. In some cases, the group may be able to function using emails. In other cases, especially if there are documents that need to be developed and shared, a platform like Google Drive or Sharepoint may be required.



TIP

To keep the network focused, start each meeting with a reminder of the network's vision, objectives, and or goals.

Navigate decision-making and manage conflicts

The charter should clearly outline how decisions will be made and how the group will proceed when there is disagreement or a lack of alignment with goals and objectives. During key decision-making moments—or when differing opinions arise—the charter can serve as a shared reference point to guide the group's next steps. To help the group navigate major decisions and periods of uncertainty, consider the following strategies:

- Foster a culture of open dialogue, transparency, and respect. Encourage open communication and the free exchange of ideas through meetings, emails, or a designated platform. Valuing and acknowledging differing opinions—not suppressing them—can build trust and support a collaborative, innovative environment.
- If you choose to engage a skilled facilitator, they can help the group manage conflict, maintain momentum, and stay focused on outcomes.
- Acknowledge and navigate group dynamics. All groups go through predictable phases—forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning. Understanding and naming these stages can help members recognize normal challenges and avoid misinterpreting slow progress as failure. Periodically revisiting these dynamics can increase patience, empathy, and resilience within the group.
- Establish methods for overcoming obstacles. Anticipate moments when the group may feel stuck or lose momentum. One useful approach is to periodically revisit the group's goals and objectives to reconnect with its original purpose and renew collective motivation.

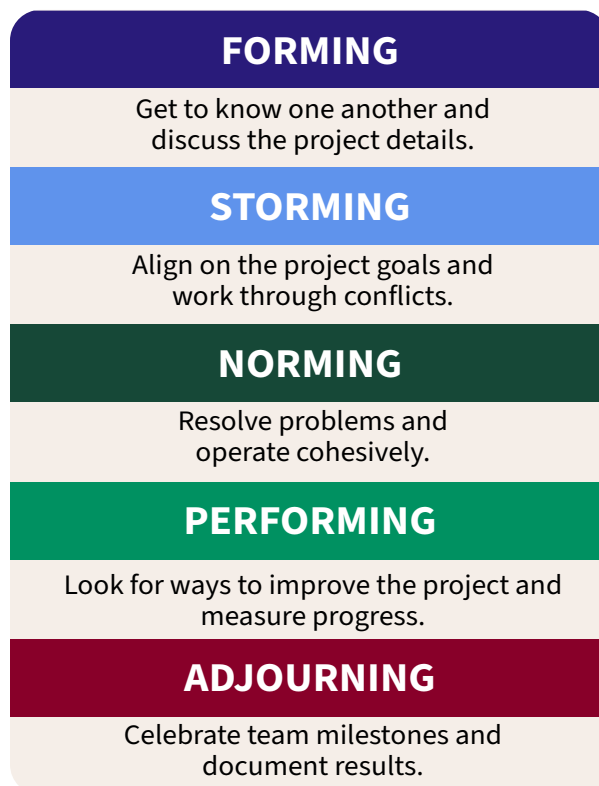


Figure 3. The Tuckman stages of group development.

Step 7: Monitor Progress and Report Out

Tracking progress is an important project task but is not always completed. Sometimes groups are too busy or generally satisfied with the work and can neglect monitoring the work and communicating the results of that work. Tracking and reporting are part of “adaptive management”—continuously managing and modifying work, especially when faced with uncertainty—and is especially useful when dealing with complex, dynamic systems and new information.

Periodically evaluate progress both qualitative and quantitative

The project management team should collect data, information and stories to determine whether progress is being made on the goals and objectives. The collected information should then be summarized for the network members and presented in an understandable format. This could take the form of a summary email or document. Networks with sufficient resources could consider using dashboards and websites to highlight the work-to-date. Periodically, an all-network meeting could be devoted to reviewing and examining progress.

Incorporate feedback loops into the process to learn and adjust strategies as the network and external environment evolve

Once a progress report is completed, efforts should be made to honestly and openly discuss what’s working and what needs improvement. The network may need to make decisions on what tasks to modify, continue or stop. New tasks can also be identified to address any gaps in the completion of tasks. In more extreme cases, the network may need to consider modifying the program goals and objectives to better align with changing environments.

Celebrate and promote successes

Celebrating and promoting successes both internally and externally is essential for maintaining momentum, building credibility, and enhancing the visibility of the network. Milestones and achievements should be shared through a variety of communication channels such as emails and press releases, website updates, and open house events. Successes should be boldly celebrated and widely shared; they can foster the momentum of the network’s progress. At the same time, it is important not to shy away from acknowledging areas that are off-track or in need of improvement. Being transparent about both wins and challenges fosters trust, encourages learning, and strengthens the overall resilience of the network.



PARTNERS IN ENERGY

Partners in Energy can help evaluate network progress, design compelling progress reports, and support communication to network members and beyond.



Step 8: Sunset the Network

Every network has a lifecycle and when your network is near the end of its useful life, consideration should be given to thoughtfully winding down the work and ensuring that its legacy endures. Ending a network isn't a failure, it's part of a healthy lifecycle that allows energy and resources to be redirected with intention.

Determine when the work is complete

Reference back to [Step 3: Define the Network Structure](#), [Step 4: Set Measurable Goals](#), and [Step 5: Create a Work Plan](#) to determine when the work of the network is complete. This could be the role of a project management team or a subgroup delegated to review information and ask critical questions. Check with both network members and external partners to determine if the network should be sunset. Specifically, review the following questions:

- Revisit the network's original goals and outcomes—have they been met?
- Is the network's purpose still relevant?
- Has it naturally run its course?
- Is there a natural opportunity for transition (e.g., branching off into a new group or initiative)?

Plan for a celebratory and energizing closeout meeting

If the network meets its goals, or if the decision is made to end the network for any other reason, a series of close-out steps should be taken. For example, organize a celebratory event to acknowledge the group's work, share outcome successes, and reflect on the network's journey. Consider the following checklist for organizing a celebration event:

- If the event is in-person, refreshments should be provided.
- Create space for members to share reflections, lessons learned, and ongoing needs that may shape future collaboration.
- Acknowledge individuals, organizations, and champions who played key roles. This would also include any non-network partners who assisted with the completion of the work.
- Thank participants and share stories and highlights that reinforce the value of the network's work and relationships.
- Consider inviting external stakeholders or funders to witness the network's impact.

Document and share outcomes

Networks can generate significant results and documentation during the course of the project; consider what will be done with any materials created and how the results will be communicated. In addition, networks create extensive experiences and lessons learned, both of which may be valuable for others to understand. Consider the following checklist for final documentation:

- Develop a final summary or report that captures goals achieved, key takeaways, and remaining opportunities.
- Consider communicating the end of the network to an external audience.
- Share-out results widely to help other networks or communities learn from the experience and build on the progress.
- If applicable, archive materials in a central location that can be accessed by network members or future collaborators.

Plan for what comes next

The end of the network doesn't necessarily mean the end of the work. Some work may continue in other forms and new opportunities may be identified. Some members of the network may continue to track new ideas and unexpected synergies. As a result, there may be a purpose for a future iteration of the original network.

- Identify any next steps, hand-offs, or spin-offs that will carry the work forward (e.g., new initiatives, policy changes, implementation efforts).
- Keep communication channels open for future collaboration, even if the formal network is dissolving.
- Monitor the “shared ecosystem” to determine if there is a future need for the network to be reconstituted. In some cases, the network may be placed on a hiatus in case future opportunities arise.



ENERGY ACTION NETWORK CASE STUDIES



Front Range Beneficial Electrification Network (FRBEN)

Type of Network: Coordinated Action

Category	Advocacy
Network Overview and Objectives	FRBEN is a regional network focused on advancing beneficial electrification (BE), particularly heat pump adoption, among local governments along Colorado's Front Range. It aims to coordinate efforts, share resources, and cultivate alignment across project implementation, workforce development, messaging and outreach, and funding opportunities.
Network Structure	Voluntary, ongoing network with no formal legal structure. Guided by a charter and a project management team of local sustainability leaders. No dedicated funding; supported through in-kind contributions.
Partners in Energy Role	Partners in Energy facilitated workshops have helped clarify the network's objective, supported charter development, provided data analysis to inform goal setting, facilitated working groups, and has helped provide project management to keep the network organized and moving forward.
Key Challenges	Ensuring equity among participants with varying resources; defining network boundaries (geographic scope, eligible participants, vendor involvement); preventing dominance by any one organization.
Key Successes	Served as an incubator for collaborative initiatives, including DRCOG's successful Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG) submission. Created a trusted space for peer learning among sustainability practitioners.
Key Lessons Learned	Clearly define the network's scope and who is included and maintain transparency to avoid hidden agendas. Informal, low-barrier models can work well when paired with shared purpose and trust.
Relevant Network Resources	• Front Range Beneficial Electrification Network Charter • Custom analysis: - FRBEN 2020-2023 Heat Pump Adoption Narrative

Building Decarbonization Network

Type of Network: Coordinated Action

Category	Summary
Network Overview and Objectives	The Building Decarbonization Network brings together five major organizations including Xcel Energy (XE), Colorado Energy Office (CEO), Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG), Rewiring America, and the Collective Clean Energy Fund (CCEF). The network was formed in response to the influx of funding each group received to support building decarbonization, which created an incentive to coordinate programs and avoid duplication. At its core, the network aims to streamline program delivery and customer experience for both market-rate and income-qualified households.
Network Structure	The network was launched after a November 2024 workshop, which produced a living roadmap outlining goals and coordination strategies. Although intended for collaborative planning, the structure evolved into more information sharing with 1:1 coordination taking place outside of BDN meetings and reducing full-group involvement. As programs begin rolling out, day-to-day coordination needs are expected to shift. The network is ongoing, but its long-term future will be reassessed based on needs.
Key Challenges	Much of the coordination now happens through individual conversations , emphasizing the difficulty of program design across multiple organizations. Organizations are operating at different speeds , with varying decision-making authority among participants.
Key Successes	The network served as a critical initial convener helping organizations begin essential conversations and clarify overlapping efforts. It also supported the development of a shared messaging framework , fostered mutual awareness, and provided infrastructure (Microsoft Teams site, consistent communication) that participants found helpful to support inter-organizational communication and maintain momentum. Though many programs are still in development, the network has already helped shape internal coordination and messaging strategies.
Partners in Energy's Role	Partners in Energy played a key role in forming and managing the network by facilitating the initial workshop , helping draft the roadmap, setting up a shared digital workspace , facilitating working groups, providing project management, and maintaining regular communication (e.g., monthly email updates).
Key Lessons Learned	Setting up a roadmap early is critical and it must be revisited periodically as goals and needs evolve. Coordinating larger networks takes significant effort , particularly when subgroup and 1:1 meetings emerge. A shared digital space provides a needed “home” for the work and fosters collaboration. As projects and relationships become more complex, it's important to reassess goals and structures to stay aligned and responsive. Coordinating complex, multi-organizational workstreams can be time intensive.
Relevant Network Resources	• Xcel Energy Grid of the Future • DRCOG Building Decarbonization Oversight Committee Meeting February 2025 • Rewiring America Residential Electrification Model • Xcel Energy Partners in Energy IRA Resource Guide • Xcel Energy Partners in Energy Clean Energy Careers

Electrification Workforce Network

Type of Network: Relationship Building

Category	Summary
Network Overview and Objectives	The Electrification Workforce Network (EWN) was formed to foster collaboration between industry stakeholders to increase equitable access to quality jobs in beneficial electrification and energy efficiency. For job seekers, the pathway into electrification careers can be unclear and fragmented, as various organizations control different steps in the process without strong coordination. EWN acts as the “glue”, helping align stakeholders, clarify pathways, and improve accessibility for workers, especially from disadvantaged communities. The network includes a diverse set of participants, brought in primarily through personal outreach and grant-driven criteria, and represents education, labor, public agencies, utilities, and community-based organizations.
Network Structure	The network was championed by individuals and intentionally designed to include a range of stakeholders from workforce organizations, public agencies, labor, and community-based organizations. Initial membership was built by personal invitations with the intention to grow the network organically. An Energy Action Plan was developed to define roles, though additional clarity is needed. A core PM team of approximately five people meets bi-weekly, and broader network meetings are currently ongoing.
Key Challenges	The network seeks to balance a broader reach with a focused impact on disadvantaged populations, which can create tension in scope, as . As membership grows, it becomes harder to control all network outputs.
Key Successes	EWN has been identified as a reliable and valued space in the workforce development field, particularly for spotlighting electrification. Participants report excitement and a sense of belonging in the network. The group has hosted successful webinars and events to elevate awareness and engagement, while also providing real resources for job seekers and workforce development organizations.
Partners in Energy’s Role	Partners in Energy supported the creation of the network’s Energy Action Plan. Partners in Energy provides implementation support via project management, network brand development, and event support.
Key Lessons Learned	Having strong champions to rally participants and build initial momentum is essential, especially when launching a new network. As the network expands, ensuring that all network outputs stay true to the mission becomes more difficult, and it’s important to adjust expectations around members’ capacity and priorities. Members consistently emphasized the importance of networking, and the shared understanding that the network is essential for coordinating efforts and achieving common goals. The network has reinforced that people are willing to work together when they see the value, and success depends on creating space for that collaboration to thrive.
Resources and Support	The network is supported by a mix of resources, including small-scale funding from Partners in Energy (e.g., \$500 for events), a hosted website by DRCOG, events hosted by members, webinar presentations from members, and project management from Partners in Energy. While progress is not formally tracked by metrics, participation in webinars and events is monitored. The network model is seen as essential to achieving its goals.
Relevant Network Resources	• Electrification Workforce Network (EWN) Energy Action Plan • Electrification Workforce Network (EWN) June 2025 Webinar Slides

Boulder County Electric Vehicle Collaboration Cohort

Type of Network: Advocacy

Category	Summary
Network Overview and Objectives	The Boulder County Electric Vehicle (EV) Collaboration Cohort was developed to collaboratively grow and implement a strategic roadmap that supports the transition to an equitable electric vehicle future in Boulder County. Through partnership among local governments, business associations, nonprofit organizations, state agencies, and Xcel Energy, this plan aims to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by advancing transportation electrification solutions that are safe, reliable, inclusive, and aligned with the sustainability goals of Boulder County communities. Building on existing initiatives, the plan seeks to accelerate progress through coordinated action, ensuring that the benefits of electrified transportation are accessible to all.
Network Structure	Network members primarily included sustainability leads from local governments, with communications and policy staff included as needed as well as some key community partners. The network operated without a formal MOU since the effort spanned many communities. The group split into subgroups for focused conversations, with periodic reconvening of the full network. While Partners in Energy support ended in 2024, the County has continued coordination.
Key Challenges	A lack of formal structure (no MOU) led to decentralized decision-making and differing community priorities complicated alignment. Inconsistent Xcel Energy coverage across the county created gaps in implementation using Partners in Energy resources, without additional support provided by other utilities. Evolving resource availability from the federal government, local governments, and utilities like Xcel Energy slowed progress and support at various points in the process.
Key Successes	Boulder County successfully secured a federal grant to support the installation of charging stations at multifamily properties. There was strong community buy-in, with EVs identified as a shared priority and communities leveraging each other's strengths in meetings. The network's flexible structure also allowed for responsiveness and targeted conversations.
Partners in Energy's Role	Partners in Energy supported the network with planning and workshop facilitation, plan development, data analysis, mapping, communications and outreach, and targeted research (e.g., ADA considerations, rates and pricing, and multifamily housing outreach). Their involvement helped establish the foundation for collaboration and resource-sharing.
Key Lessons Learned	Establishing a decision-making process and structure early is critical for alignment and efficiency. A County-led, regional approach proved beneficial—communities often looked to the County for guidance, and collective progress relied on alignment. Jurisdictional boundaries can complicate coordination and transportation and EV planning require cooperation across regions and agencies. Organizations within networks (i.e., County/DRCOG) must be navigated carefully.
Resources and Support	The County matched the federal grant and brought in external consultants to support grant writing. Utilities like Xcel Energy provided letters of support, demonstrating multi-stakeholder buy-in and strengthened the application.
Relevant Network Resources	- Partners in Energy – Boulder County Regional Electric Vehicle Planning Collaboration Cohort Summary - Regional Transportation Electrification Plan for Boulder County Communities

