



Infrastructure Policy Priority Brief

Clean & Green Infrastructure

What is Clean & Green Infrastructure?

Clean and green infrastructure refers to the development, retrofit, and maintenance of public infrastructure projects that prioritize energy efficiency, sustainability, and environmental health. This includes integrating renewable energy sources, like solar and wind power, into new infrastructure projects, and retrofitting existing structures to reduce their carbon footprint and energy consumption. Green infrastructure also involves designing and implementing natural solutions, such as green roofs, urban forests, and wetlands, to manage stormwater, reduce heat islands, and improve air quality. Ultimately, clean and green infrastructure aims to create resilient and sustainable communities by fostering environmental stewardship, enhancing public health, and promoting economic vitality through sustainable practices.

Clean & Green Infrastructure in the South

In the Southern United States, clean and green infrastructure is increasingly becoming a focal point of [policy discussions](#), although its implementation varies widely across the region. Southern states have traditionally relied on fossil fuel-based energy sources, with $\frac{1}{3}$ of the top 15 states that are [most dependent](#) on fossil fuels being located in the South (West Virginia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Texas, and Mississippi). Many Southern states have been slower to adopt [comprehensive clean energy policies](#) compared to other parts of the country, with six states in the South not yet having climate action plans in place (Texas, Mississippi, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, and West Virginia). It must be noted, though, that five of the seven states that have implemented climate action plans did so over 10 years ago. However, recent trends show a growing awareness of the need for sustainable infrastructure as climate change impacts become more pronounced, and as federal incentives encourage states to invest in renewable energy and energy-efficient projects.

Some Southern states, like North Carolina and Georgia, have begun to make significant strides in promoting clean energy and green infrastructure. For example, [North Carolina](#) has invested in solar energy projects, making it one of the leading states in solar capacity. Additionally, federal funding from the [Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act \(IIJA\)](#) and other initiatives provides Southern states with the financial resources to prioritize clean and green infrastructure. However, disparities in political will and resource allocation mean that progress is uneven, with many rural and economically disadvantaged communities lacking access to the benefits of these developments.

How Can Clean and Green Infrastructure Advance Equity in the South?

Advancing clean and green infrastructure in the South is critical for addressing historical inequities that have disproportionately affected marginalized communities. For decades, infrastructure policies and projects in the South have often reinforced segregation and inequality, with low-income and minority communities bearing the brunt of environmental degradation and disinvestment. By prioritizing clean and green infrastructure, we have an opportunity to correct these injustices and ensure that all communities, particularly those that have been historically underserved, benefit from modern, sustainable infrastructure.

Green infrastructure projects can significantly improve [public health](#) by reducing pollution, mitigating the effects of urban heat islands, and improving water and air quality. Investing in clean and green infrastructure can [create new jobs and economic opportunities](#) in renewable energy and construction sectors. Clean and green infrastructure projects are designed to enhance the [resilience of communities](#) to climate change and weather events, helping to protect the livelihoods and well-being of those who are often least equipped to recover from disasters. Additionally, as we retrofit existing infrastructure and build new projects with sustainability in mind, it is crucial to prioritize equitable access to the benefits of clean energy, efficient transportation, and safe public spaces, ensuring that all communities have access to affordable, reliable, and sustainable infrastructure.

Legislative Efforts Related to Clean & Green Infrastructure

South Carolina: [Senate Bill 542](#) (failed): This bill would have established a commercial property assessed clean energy and resiliency program that local governments may implement to ensure that owners of agricultural, commercial, industrial, and multi-family residential properties can obtain low-cost, long-term financing for qualifying improvements. The goal of the programs would be to increase economic development, add jobs, and increase the sustainability and safety of the building stock, improve disaster and emergency response at no cost to local

governments, decrease water and energy costs and consumption, and encourage energy and water sustainability.