

Smarter Energy Planning, Stronger Communities

As electricity demand surges, energy decisions made today will shape energy costs, reliability and impacts for decades. Integrated resource planning helps utilities and regulators make smarter choices that protect customers, public health and the environment.

Today's power decisions shape future costs

U.S. electricity demand is projected to rise through 2027, driven largely by increasing demand from large computing facilities, including data centers. As utilities face pressure to build new power plants and grid infrastructure to meet this rising demand, integrated resource planning (IRP) can help utilities, regulators and communities weigh options before making major commitments. Effective IRPs can make energy planning more efficient, inclusive and responsive to customers' needs.

What is integrated resource planning?

An IRP is a long-term roadmap for meeting electricity needs, usually looking 10 to 20 years ahead. Utilities forecast demand and project ways to meet it, comparing options such as renewable energy, fossil fuel power plants, battery storage, energy efficiency and programs that reduce electricity use during peak periods.

Utilities develop these plans under the rules of their state or territory, often with oversight from regulators. Depending on the jurisdiction, regulators may review, approve or require changes to a plan. Many IRP processes allow opportunities for community and stakeholder input. An IRP guides future investments but does not automatically authorize individual projects or their costs.

Why does it matter?

Good planning includes many factors, from providing reliable electricity to keeping energy prices down, avoiding unnecessary costs and accounting for how energy decisions affect air quality, public health and local economies.

What stronger planning can deliver

By comparing energy options and considering their long-term impacts, IRPs can help deliver benefits for customers, communities and the economy.

- **Lower bills.** IRPs can help avoid unnecessary costs and fuel-price risks.
- **Reliable power.** Anticipate extreme weather, changing demand and technologies that lead to a more flexible grid.
- **Cleaner air and healthier communities.** Compare how different energy options affect public health, air quality and climate pollution.
- **Economic opportunity.** Assess how energy choices affect jobs, businesses and local investment.
- **Fairer outcomes.** Identify which communities bear the costs and pollution from energy infrastructure and help ensure that the energy system benefits all.

What makes an IRP effective?

Effective planning compares a full range of options, from fossil-power plants and renewable energy to storage, energy efficiency technologies and grid improvements. Effective IRPs test different scenarios, weigh long-term costs, reliability, public health and environmental impacts, and invite meaningful public input. They also adapt as energy needs and conditions change.

> "Involvement in the IRP process can give communities a voice in energy decisions that may shape their electricity costs, health and environment for decades." **– Jolette Westbrook**; Director & Senior Attorney, Regulatory

How do IRPs vary by state?

IRP requirements and practices vary across the country. Some states have well-established planning processes with regular updates, regulatory oversight and opportunities for public participation. Others are developing or strengthening their requirements. These differences influence how utilities evaluate energy options, how regulators review proposed plans and how communities can help shape their energy future.

Public participation leads to informed decisions

Electricity planning affects everyone, but not every community experiences the same costs or risks. Residents, consumer advocates and local organizations can bring important perspectives on costs, outages, pollution and community priorities. Their input can help utilities and regulators challenge assumptions and consider alternatives.

In 2025, Minnesota regulators approved a stakeholder-supported settlement that changed Xcel Energy's integrated resource plan. The agreement, shaped by clean energy advocates, state officials and other stakeholders, included stronger commitments to local solar, battery storage and opportunities for customers to participate in the clean energy transition. The decision shows how public participation can influence long-term energy investments and help ensure plans reflect community priorities.

Questions worth asking

- Does the utility explain why it expects demand to grow and why it has chosen a particular set of solutions?
- Have alternatives been compared? Could efficiency, storage or existing grid resources meet rising need at lower cost?
- How could proposed investments affect customer bills, particularly for lower-income customers?
- Does the plan consider local air quality and climate impacts?
- Are assumptions and opportunities for comment clear and accessible? Have utilities been clear about how decisions were made?

What communities stand to gain

A stronger IRP can help avoid costly investments, support more reliable service and reduce pollution. Community members may help strengthen an IRP by asking important questions about costs, alternatives and potential impacts.

While decisions about how costs are divided among customers may happen in separate proceedings, IRPs provide an important opportunity to examine how proposed investments could affect electricity bills and whether lower-cost alternatives are available.

How to make your voice heard

Here are a few ways to get involved in integrated resource planning:

- **Find the plan.** Visit your state public utility or public service commission website and search for your utility's IRP proceeding or docket.
- **Review the choices.** Look for the demand forecast, proposed investments and alternatives the utility considered.
- **Share your perspective.** Check for public hearings, comment periods or other opportunities to raise concerns, ask questions and suggest alternatives (rules vary by state). Community experiences help regulators understand how utility choices affect people.
- **Ask how decisions were made.** Encourage utilities and regulators to explain how public feedback and different options shaped the plan.

Learn how to participate in energy planning, including how to draft and submit public comments, through **Community Voices in Energy**.



Reach out to Jolette Westbrook, Director & Senior Attorney, Regulatory Solutions for Environmental Defense Fund at jwestbrook@edf.org for more information.

Environmental Defense Fund
18 Tremont St STE 900
Boston, MA 02108

Finding the ways that work.
EDF.org
T 617 406 1838