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**Research Statement**

**Research Topic Development**

We formed as a group for a policy proposal project in “Climate Change and Sustainability,” a class cross-listed between Sustainability Studies and Earth & Planetary Science. Two of our members are Sustainability Studies students, while the third is minoring in EPS. As such, our interests were interdisciplinary, but with a mutual interest in renewable energy, its place within sustainability and the fight against climate change.

We knew we wanted to write a policy that dealt with public access to renewable energy options specifically in New Mexico, but after delving into research on wind, solar, and nuclear energy options and policies construction it became clear that a community solar program would be the most effective for our proposal. Our plan began as an idea for funding small scale solar farms within community areas such as parks or schools. Sustainability has three pillars, economic, environmental, and social, and we wanted our policy to reflect this, thus requiring additional research and planning that resulted in the community emphasis and inclusion of low-income and rural areas.

Through the input of our professor as well as initial library database-driven media research into existing programs for local solar arrays, we learned about current community solar programs and were able to refine our concept to fit within this framework.

**Research Strategies**

Sustainability is at the intersection of science and society and thus requires interdisciplinary research: our proposal, for example, required us to consider how climate change and energy will impact New Mexico, but also the economic and social impacts of these issues. When looking at large-scale transitions to more sustainable systems, past data and case studies are crucial to build on when coming from a place where such transitions would need to be implemented from the ground up. The UNM Law Library guide for New Mexico legislative documents helped us find different versions of the bills we referenced, forming a key framework for our policy as a supplement to the Energy Transition Act and a successor to the tabled House Bill 210 from the 2019 New Mexican legislative session that improves on it. Published case studies of successful community solar programs within the United States proved to be especially effective for our policy proposal, and programs in Minnesota gave us the most to work with in terms of long-standing success.

We used search terms such as “solar energy”, “solar arrays”, “rooftop arrays”, “solar farms”, and eventually through our discovery of the Minnesota case study, we understood that “community solar” was the most effective search term to use in order to find the detailed information we needed.

**Research Resources**

During the initial stages of our research process we had difficulty finding more informal sources through library databases, such as perspectives from activists or special interest groups. We were also interested in reading reports from within the industry, as well as basic primers that we could cite. Community solar programs have only truly developed within the last decade and are still a niche field of policy, and as such lack robust academic or media representation. To overcome this, we searched the websites of interest groups and policy research organizations in order to find links to further resources. For example, from the Interstate Renewable Energy Council’s website and articles on community solar, we were able to find the Low-Income Solar Policy Guide. This was an important resource for our work on making the policy inclusive, due to New Mexico’s largely rural and low-income population.

We were able to build an informational foundation with planned search strategies and while using library resources including the Library’s Sustainability Studies resources guide under “Environment Complete”, hours of access of the Fine Arts Library study rooms, the PAIS database for policy reports, and the UNM Law Library guide for finding New Mexico legislative documents. Our discovery of the strongest material for the proposal was, however, often coincidental. Information such as the existence of Minnesota solar programs and subscription-based community solar were “stumbled upon” while researching our initially planned avenues of focus- these details redirected much of our study and became the main body of our final policy proposal.