The Santa Barbara Energy & Resilience Summit

Recap











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The 2035 Initiative

powered by constructive

Expectations exceeded.



We came together on May 8, 2025 with a clear purpose: turn urgency into action. The Santa Barbara Energy & Resilience Summit gathered an extraordinary coalition of local leaders, entrepreneurs, policymakers, investors, and experts determined to chart a new path for our region's energy future. Santa Barbara County sits on the front lines of climate change—grappling with ever-more-intense wildfires, post-fire debris flows, and grid outages that imperil our community's safety and prosperity. Our goal was not simply to discuss solutions, but to kick-start them—and that is exactly what this summit achieved.

Over the course of one high-energy day we rolled up our sleeves to advance a portfolio of clean energy resiliency projects. From campus microgrids to community solar farms, each initiative we tackled is a building block toward a cleaner, safer, and more reliable energy system for Santa Barbara. The momentum was tangible: barriers identified, action plans drafted, and even partnerships sparked on the spot. That progress is a testament to our community's determination—a reminder that when Santa Barbara faces a challenge, we innovate and collaborate to overcome it.

To everyone who participated: thank you. Your insights, passion, and dedication have accelerated our journey toward resilience. We are deeply grateful to the UCSB community for hosting us and to the many hands working behind the scenes to make this event possible. Much work lies ahead, but the optimism and solidarity that filled the summit leave us confident that Santa Barbara will lead by example. The path forward is bright—powered by community spirit and a shared vision of an energy-resilient Santa Barbara.

Tim Hade

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Leah Stokes

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Impacts & Insights

Santa Barbara's push for community-led energy resilience is not only an environmental imperative but also a model of grassroots leadership in the face of climate threats. The summit underscored how local action—backed by innovation and collaboration—can fortify our region against wildfire-related outages and high energy costs. Following is a recap of the featured initiatives and actions to move forward.

10

project pitches

8

structured workshops

Featured Resilience Projects

Ten clean energy resiliency projects presented at the Summit, ranging from microgrids at critical facilities to novel financing mechanisms for distributed energy. Together, they illustrate a diverse approach to building a more resilient Santa Barbara.

1. **Santa Barbara City College (SBCC) Community Resilience Hub**

   A $20 million microgrid project (seeded by a federal grant) to provide round-the-clock solar and battery backup power at SBCC, enabling the campus to serve as a community shelter and emergency hub when the grid goes down.

2. **UCSB District Heating & Cooling Efficiency Project**

   A comprehensive plan to electrify and modernize UCSB's campus energy systems (replacing fossil-fueled heating) in order to cut carbon emissions and enhance efficiency in line with UC's 2045 climate goals.

3. Santa Barbara County Food Bank Microgrid

An initiative to install a solar-powered microgrid at the county Food Bank facility to reduce operating costs and ensure uninterrupted power for critical food distribution and disaster relief services during outages.

4. Rancho Goleta Lakeside Solar Microgrid

A proposal to build a solar-plus-storage community microgrid for the Rancho Goleta Lakeside mobile home park, delivering energy cost savings, cleaner power, and reliable backup electricity for a vulnerable community.

5. Santa Barbara Clean Energy Initiatives

A City-led program to transform local rooftops into solar + storage microgrids, boosting neighborhood resilience and sustainability despite challenges like new net metering rules and aging infrastructure.

6. DoubleLand Agrivoltaics Project

A pilot project deploying movable solar panel arrays over farmland to generate clean power while conserving water and regenerating soil, helping farms comply with new groundwater rules and demonstrating the synergy of agriculture and renewable energy.

7. Regent Craft Project*

An all-electric, high-speed "seaglider" that operates exclusively over water to connect coastal destinations at low cost and with zero GHG emissions.

8. Dragon Wings—Clean Temporary Power

A cutting-edge solution featuring portable solar rigs with fold-out panels and batteries (up to 1 MW capacity) that can be rapidly deployed to provide clean, off-grid power for emergency response or remote operations, eliminating the need for diesel generators.

9. Base Power Distributed Energy Storage Framework*

Enhances energy resiliency by deploying affordable, home-based battery systems that provide backup power during outages and support grid stability during peak demand periods.

10. SparkFund Distributed Capacity Procurement (DCP)

An innovative model for utilities and large energy users to rapidly contract distributed energy resources (like batteries and solar systems) as "virtual power plants," easing grid constraints and improving resilience without costly new infrastructure.

*Projects that presented but did not host a workshop.

Key Actions & Next Steps

Beyond discussing ideas, Summit participants identified concrete next steps to advance deployment. Five key actions emerged as crucial for turning plans into reality.

50+

action items generated

1/3

of attendees volunteered to support projects moving forward

1. **Policy & Advocacy Push for Distributed Capacity Procurement**

   Draft a coalition-backed letter to policymakers (County Supervisors and state regulators) requesting support for distributed capacity procurement as an enabler of resilience programs, emphasizing community safety, wildfire risk reduction, and grid benefits.

2. **Streamline Microgrid Permitting**

   Collaborate with city, county and coastal officials to expedite permitting (e.g. reducing the three permits required) for projects like the SBCC Resilience Hub, ensuring faster implementation of critical resilience infrastructure.

3. **Mobilize Funding & Investment**

   Refine project business cases (e.g. UCSB's heating overhaul, Food Bank microgrid) and engage potential funders – from California's Infrastructure Bank to private investors and manufacturers – to secure the capital needed for project deployment.



4. Advance Public-Private Partnerships

Leverage new connections (for instance, linking project leads with partners like Schneider Electric and the Milken Institute's 10k Communities Initiative) to provide technical support and funding expertise for community microgrids such as the Food Bank and Rancho Goleta projects.

5. Continue Collaboration & Checkpoints

Establish a regular rhythm for progress – such as monthly coordination calls among project teams to share updates, establish deployment milestones, problem solve continued challenges, and keep all stakeholders accountable.

High-Level Summit Insights

The Santa Barbara Energy & Resilience Summit revealed shifts in how local leaders, innovators, and residents are thinking about energy, equity, and resilience—and what it will take to move from vision to lasting change.

86%

net promoter score*

*Net Promoter Score (NPS) is calculated as the percentage of survey respondents who rated the experience a 9 or 10 (promoters) minus the percentage who rated it 0 to 6 (detractors); total respondents = 29 out of 142 attendees

1. **Resilience is now an equity baseline, not a premium feature.**

Throughout the summit participants consistently reframed battery storage and backup power not as high-tech extras, but as baseline necessities for community safety. Attendees called for disadvantaged communities to be prioritized in project deployment, viewing energy resilience as a justice issue tied to dignity, health, and disaster preparedness. The message was clear: resilience infrastructure must start with those most at risk.

2. **Trust and simplicity are more powerful than technology alone.**

Across projects—from community solar to agrivoltaics—participants emphasized that adoption hinges on relationships and clarity. Local contractors, trusted institutions like schools and churches, and user-friendly tools were seen as critical enablers of scale. Even the most advanced solutions will struggle if they're hard to explain, difficult to install, or not visibly anchored in the community. To succeed, resilience efforts must speak plainly and meet people where they are.

3. A fail-fast, share-fast culture is taking root.

Rather than waiting for perfect pilots, stakeholders across the summit encouraged a culture of rapid experimentation and open learning. “Fail fast and pivot” was a frequently mentioned idea. Attendees want real-time insights and transparency to help turn potential project missteps into collective progress. Iterative learning may be the most important accelerant in navigating new technologies and uncertain regulatory terrain.

90%

respondents felt more confident in Santa Barbara's ability to enhance its climate and energy resilience*

79%

respondents left with a clearer understanding of specific actions that can be taken to enhance Santa Barbara's climate and energy resilience*

4. The grid edge is now the strategic center.

What once lived at the periphery—customer-sited batteries, solar, mobile storage, EVs—is now central to how Santa Barbara must plan for energy capacity and resilience. Discussions around virtual power plants, bidirectional charging, and distributed procurement illustrated how utilities, regulators, and local governments are shifting to treat the grid edge as a coordinated, dispatchable asset, not just a consumer preference. This change marks a significant reimagining of how Santa Barbara’s energy systems should be built and governed.

5. Innovation is being held back by ingrained procurement habits more than by technology.

While technical solutions abounded—from mobile solar to flexible microgrids—many participants noted that outdated procurement rules remain a hidden bottleneck. Projects struggle to move forward when RFPs favor known vendors or require fossil-based baselines. Participants called for procurement reform that focuses on outcomes (e.g. resilience, emissions, noise) rather than legacy equipment specs. Unlocking innovation may depend less on new ideas and more on clearing a path for the ones we already have.

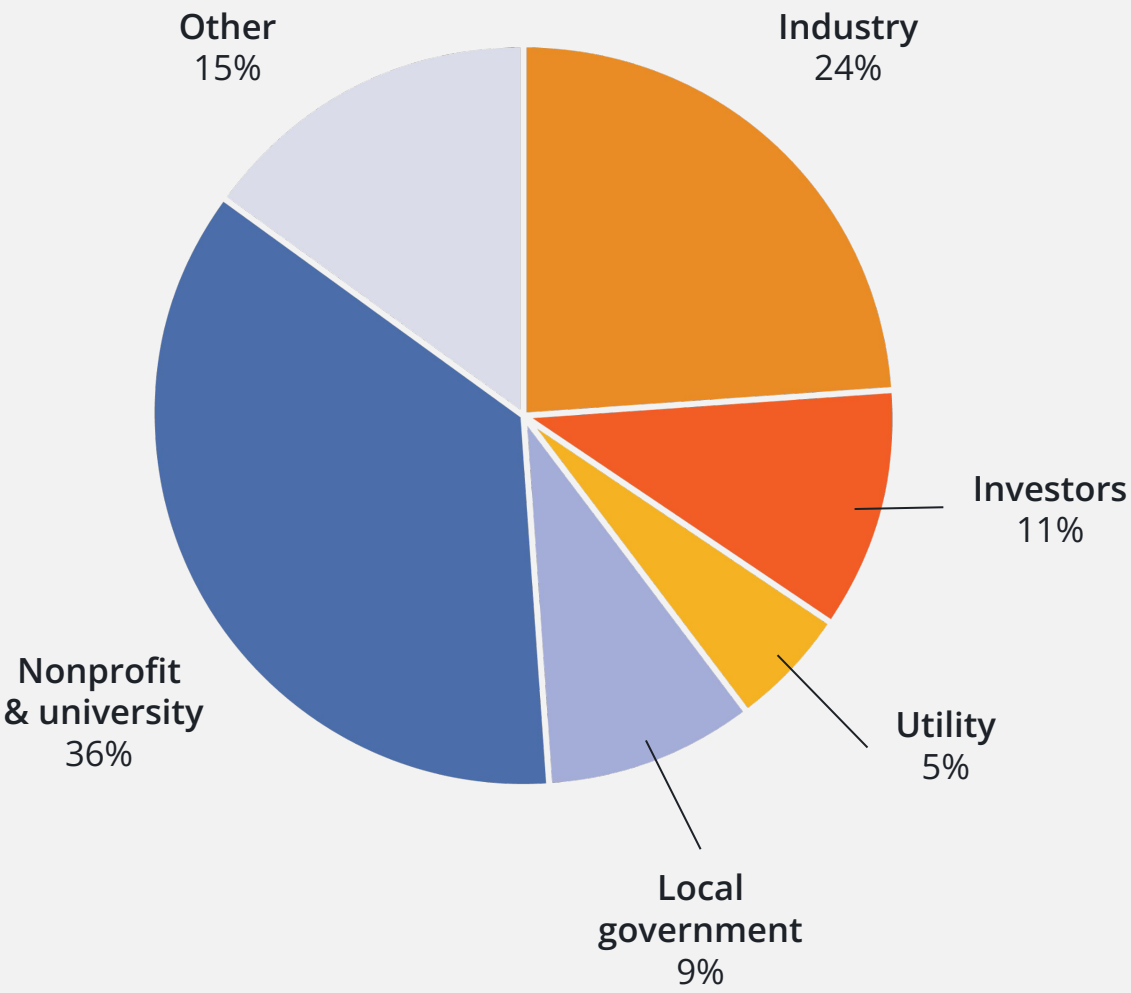
*Survey respondents who ranked their agreement with these statements a 4 or 5 out of 5

Who was in the room

142
attendees

18
US states

69
organizations



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