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# Amplifying Voices: Representing Diverse Perspectives

— Buildings, Infrastructure & Housing —  
Working Group

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**May Progress Check-In**

# Reminder of the Project Goal



March 2023

To ensure the populations in Maine most impacted by climate change are aware of and have the opportunity to influence State climate programs and policies by iteratively and intentionally engaging these “priority populations” in the Maine Climate Council process in ways that are meaningful for each population.

# The Mitchell Center Team's Role



- Develop engagement topics based on Equity Subcommittee Report (ESC) from March 2023 and Working Group (WG) feedback in January 2024
- Collaborate & contract with Community-Based Organizations (CBOs)
- Engage with Priority Populations (PPs) & support CBO engagements
- Support engagement approaches that are appropriate and natural for CBOs and PPs & fit within the predetermined timeline
- Communicate feedback from PPs and CBOs to WGs to inform WG recommendations to the Maine Climate Council (today's presentation)
- The inclusion of equity consideration lies with WGs in their recommendations (and then the Council broadly)

# Original Priority Populations List from GOPIF

- Low income households, including renters, home owners, and mobile home residents
- Older adults and youth
- Black or POC communities
- Tribal communities
- Low income communities
- Disadvantaged communities
- People with limited English proficiency, including New Mainers
- Recipients of LIHEAP, LIAP, or other energy assistance benefits
- People with mobility challenges
- People without access to reliable transportation
- Migrant farm workers and other outdoor workers
- Businesses in the natural resource industries like agriculture, forestry, and fishing who are operating at the economic margin or suffer disproportionate climate risk
- Un/underemployed people who are also representatives of a priority population or are transitioning from prison or recovery
- Minority, women-owned or veteran owned business enterprises (MWBVEs)
- Rural communities and small towns with limited staff or fiscal capacity
- Climate-frontline communities

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# We are continuing conversations with Wabanaki partners, building on multi-year relationships

- 2018-2021 Klein, Ranco, Hart, Penobscot Nation, “Future of Dams” (*Penobscot citizens and DNR staff*)
- 2021-2023 Klein, Lamb, Penobscot Nation & Passamaquoddy Tribe, “Community Window Insert Builds & Energy Justice” (*Penobscot & Passamaquoddy citizens & Housing staff*)
- 2022-2023 Klein, Lamb, Penobscot Nation, Passamaquoddy Tribe, Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, “Community Resilience Partnership Enrollment” (*citizens & staff from 3 tribes*)
- 2023-2024 Klein, Lamb, ACTT, “Intertribal Solar Cooperative” (*citizens & staff from each Wabanaki nation*)
- 2023-2027+ Klein, Lamb, Wabanaki Sustainable Energy Team, “EPA Star Grant” (*citizens and/or tribal government staff from each Wabanaki nation*)



# So far, iterative conversations have underscored the importance of

- Not including Wabanaki nations among a list of “priority populations”
- Recognizing Tribal Sovereignty
- Facilitating Government to Government interactions (e.g., Chiefs, Tribal Council)
- Incorporating tribal decision-making authority in the climate plan process
- Addressing historic injustices

***As we continue to learn more about how we can support Government-to-Government interactions:***

*We are especially grateful to Dr. Darren Ranco, Jasmine Lamb, Natalie Michelle, and Ambassador Bryant for their time and continued efforts in empowering the voices of Wabanaki Tribes.*

# Current Timeline

1. Report to WG about 1st round of engagements -- mid-May 2024
2. Second round of engagement activities -- Summer 2024
3. Report to MCC about 2nd round -- September 2024



Photo from Maine Sustainability and Water Conference session



# Thank you for earlier input on your priority questions!

1. Barriers to energy efficiency & clean energy improvements in households of all types, including rental
2. Awareness, preferences, & barriers related to different approaches to community solar & residential distributed energy (solar, wind, battery); especially for affordable housing & renters
3. Barriers for accessing HEAP & LIAP benefits & weatherization services; characteristics of eligible households receiving/not receiving these benefits
4. Awareness & barriers regarding energy efficient building codes

Thank you to the 2 members of Buildings, Infrastructure, and Housing WG who responded to our survey of Working Groups!

# Our engagement plan built on existing & planned activities

2023-2027 EPA Star grant *"The role of state networks in advancing community-initiated and -engaged sustainable energy action in underserved communities"*

- Community Sustainable Energy Team (Sep 2023-present)
  - *representatives from 6 communities with "high" social vulnerability*
- Maine Community Alternative Energy Survey (April-June 2024)
- Maine Community Alternative Energy Focus group (April 3, 2024)
- Maine Sustainability & Water Conference session 2 (March 28, 2024)
- MAINECAN: the Maine community-led Energy & Climate Action Network

**We incorporated MCC questions in these existing/planned engagements & existing classes/meetings we were involved in**

# From this foundation, we were able to “quickly” develop contracts with 9 community-based organizations

- A Climate To Thrive
- Center for an Ecology-Based Economy
- Coastal Enterprises Inc.
- Community Organizing Alliance
- Kennebec Valley Community Action Partnership
- Maine Council on Aging
- Maine Environmental Education Association
- PassivhausME
- Sunrise County Economic Council

*We are also in the process of exploring a contract with the Island Institute*

# In addition, we have multiple partners supporting this effort in other ways:

- Governor's Cabinet on Aging
- Maine Community Action Partnership
- MCAN!
- Resilient Communities L3C
- UMaine Center on Aging
- WindowDressers
- Mano e Mano

# To-date, we have collaboratively completed 29 engagements for this 1st round

- Over **1,000** members of Priority Populations reached
  - Working Group-specific topics
  - Maine Climate Council general topics
- A **variety of engagement approaches**
  - Day-long conference sessions
  - Panels
  - Focus group discussions (ex: at low-income housing, older adult housing)
  - Participation at festivals/shows
  - Community discussions
  - Round Tables (ex: Pathways to Clean Energy Jobs, Climate Change & Food Justice)
  - Teach-ins
  - Webinars
  - Surveys

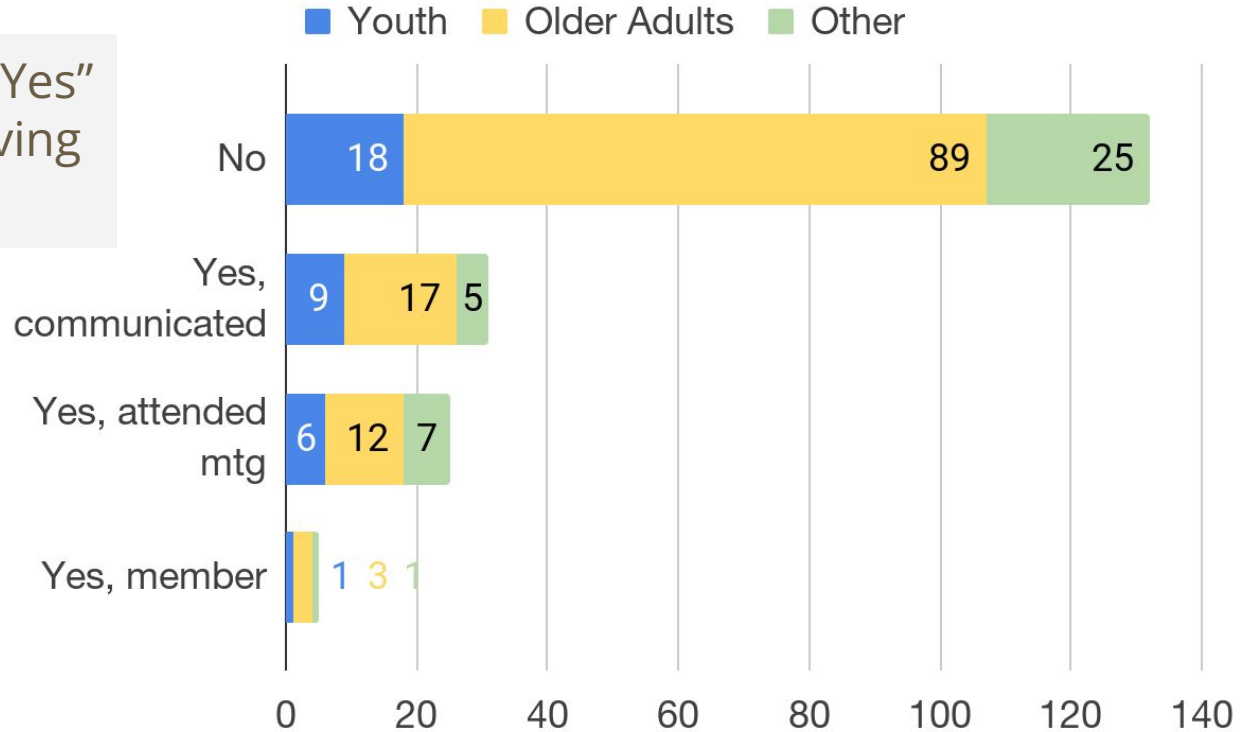
Photo courtesy of  
Community Organizing  
Alliance



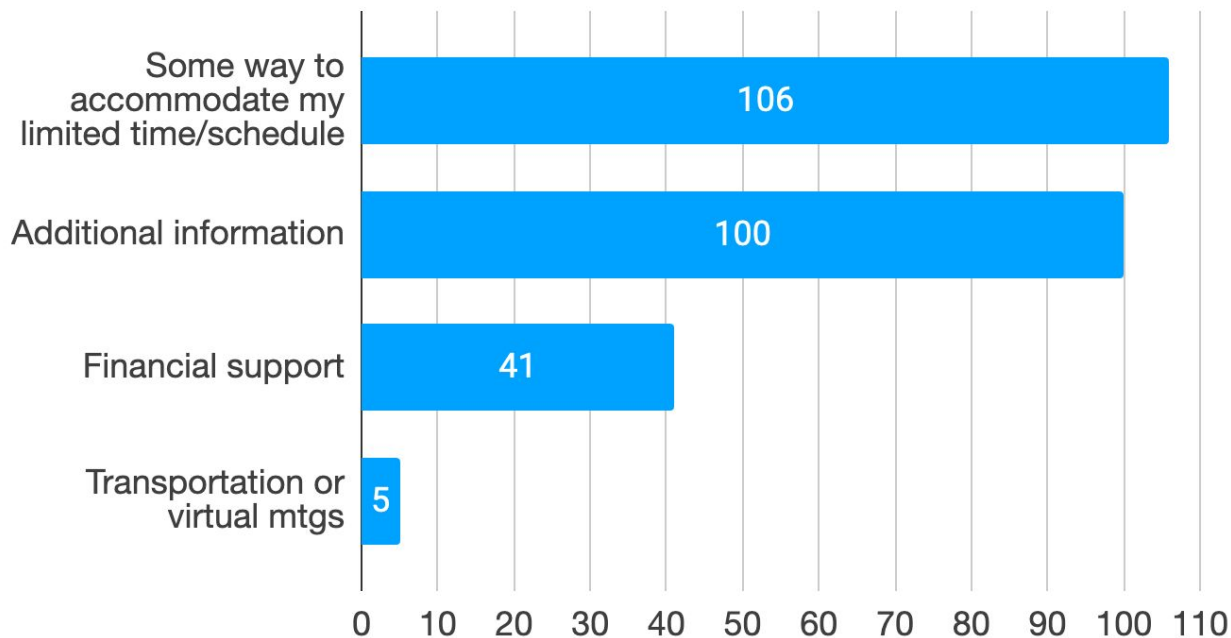
# Survey Results: Have you ever been involved in Maine Climate Council activities?

61% of 352 responded "Yes" or "Maybe a little" to having heard of the MCC

68% do/may want to be involved in this update



# What type of support would you need to be involved in the Maine Climate Council's update to the climate plan?



*"We need to put resources into public engagement on a totally different level, social media engagement, a marketing campaign to really highlight civic engagement as valuable and actually crucial to our lives."*

GOOD NEWS: 86% of 63 respondents trust climate change info from the State

# When asked ‘What are the biggest needs for you/ your community?’:

54% wrote in a *related issue* including:

- Housing shortages and the need to reduce housing costs
- Reduce heating and energy costs
- Walkable, bikeable, resilient communities
- Waste management, both in terms of landfills and recycling

An additional 12% noted *Climate Change*

Data from Maine Citizen Survey,  
priority population respondents

Photo from Maine  
Sustainability and Water  
Conference session

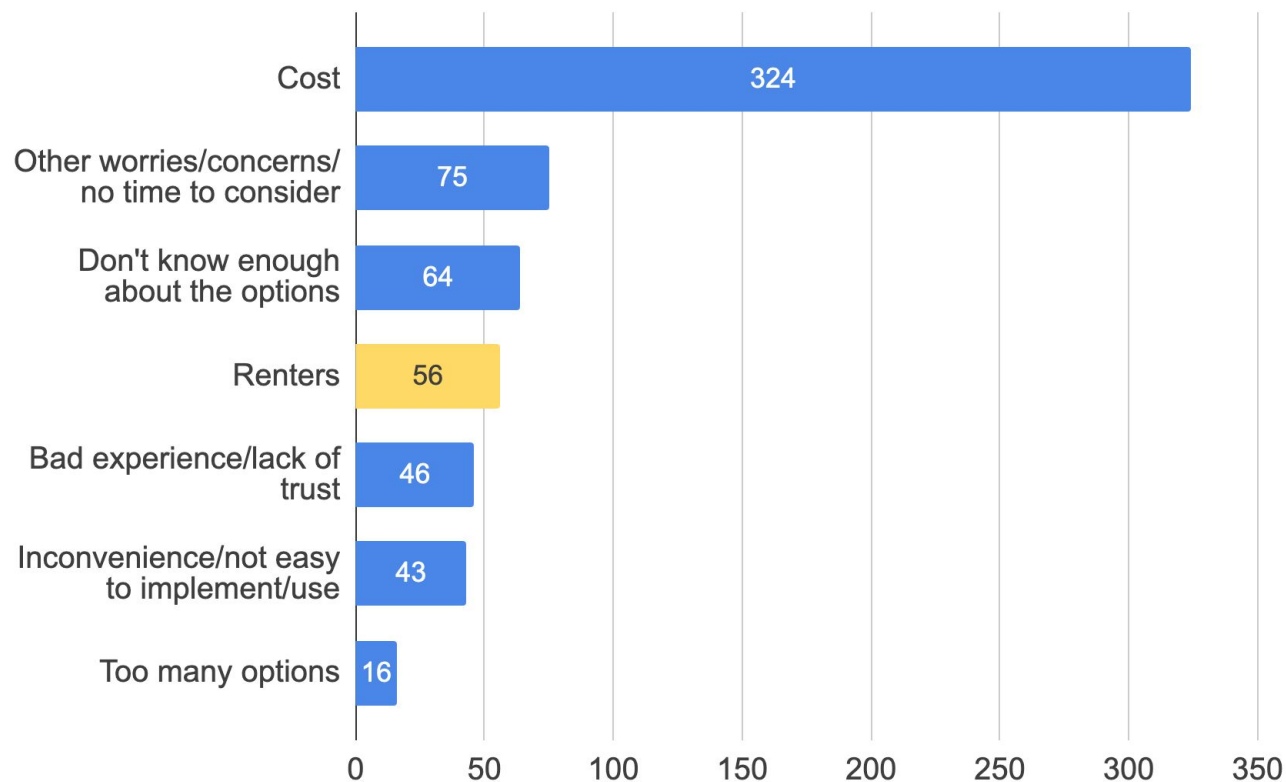




**Q1: What are barriers to energy efficiency and clean energy improvements in households of all types, including rental?**



# What makes it difficult for you to implement alternative energy options in your own life?



*For one student, even though they pay for all their utilities, their landlord does very little to change the infrastructure. The place this person is staying would be a perfect place for a heat pump system but there's no incentive for the landlord to change anything*

# We asked survey respondents to review existing programs...

There are many programs that offer financial help for installing renewable energy on your home and making your home more energy efficient. The following questions ask about these incentives:

## U.S. government

Federal tax credit of **30%** of system and installation costs for **renewable energy**: qualified solar electric, solar water heating, small wind energy, geothermal heat pump, battery storage technology (3 kWh or more), fuel cell property

Federal tax credit of **30%** of system and installation costs for **energy efficiency** improvements (up to a \$max): heat pumps & heat pump water heaters (\$2,000); insulation materials (\$1,200); home electric vehicle charger (\$1,000); energy efficient windows, air conditioners, heating equipment, water heaters & electric upgrades (\$600); home energy audit (\$150)

## Maine Housing:

**FREE Heat Pumps** and [Weatherization](#) to a limited number of eligible households (*homeowners that are eligible for HEAP - see below*).

The [Home Energy Assistance Program \(HEAP\)](#) helps qualified homeowners and renters pay heating fuel costs and heating-related repairs. The application involves a form and an interview. The benefit amount depends on household size, income and other factors

The [Low Income Assistance Plan \(LIAP\)](#) helps low-income homeowners and renters pay for electricity costs by providing a credit on their electric bills. The application is usually completed as part of the HEAP application (see above).

## WindowDressers:

**FREE** insulating window inserts for people with LOW income (income eligibility determined through community-led program)

# ...at multiple levels (federal, state, community)

## Efficiency Maine:

Up to **\$6,000** rebate for biomass boilers and furnaces

Up to **\$3,000** rebate for geothermal systems

Up to **\$4,000-\$8,000** rebate for whole-home heat pump installation, depending on income

Up to **\$4,000** rebate for partial-home heat pump installation for people with **LOW income\***

**FREE** heat pump water heaters for people with **LOW income\***

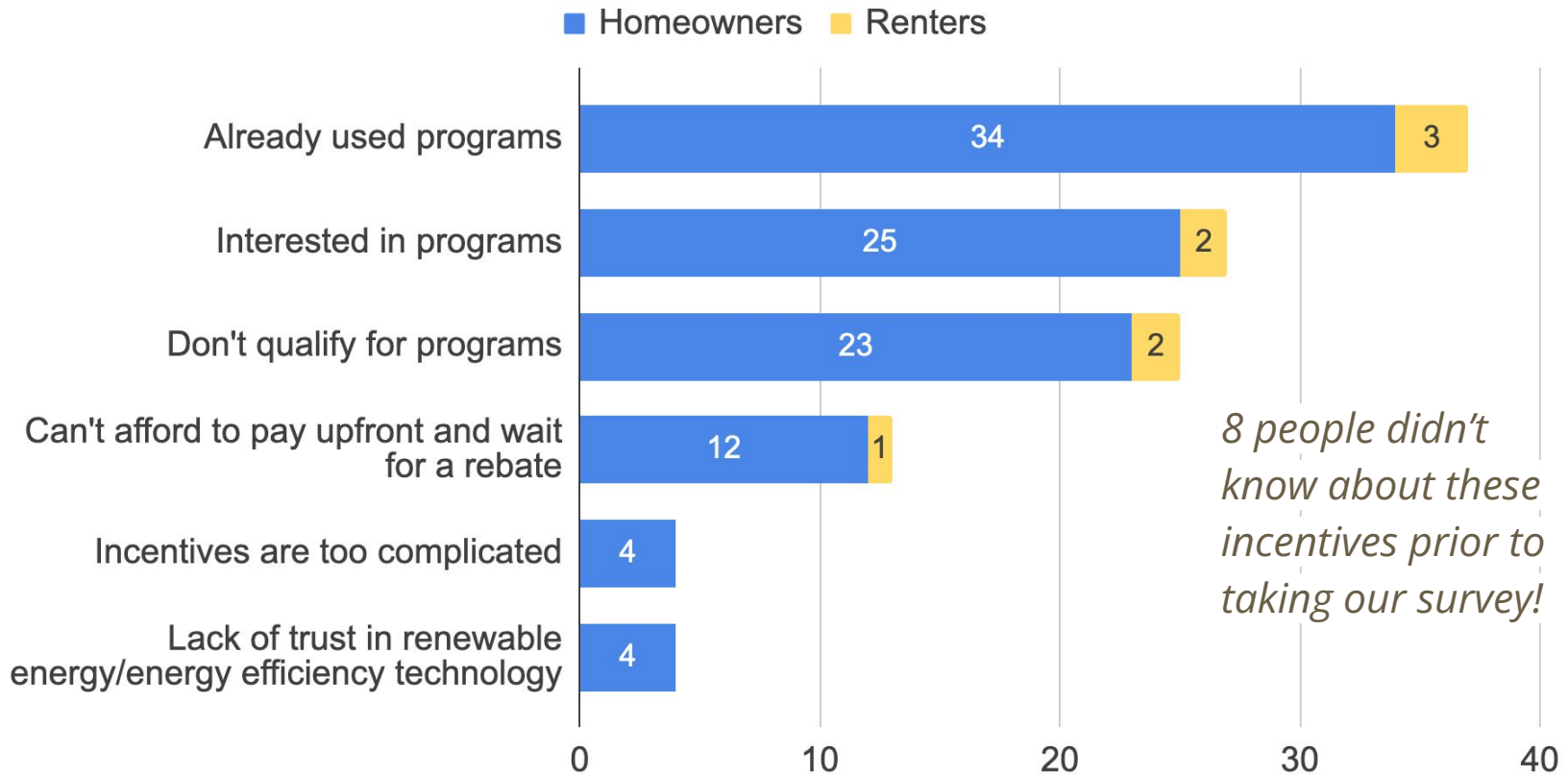
Up to **\$850** savings on heat pump water heaters for people of any income

Up to **\$4,000 to \$8,000** rebate on insulation and/or air sealing, depending on income

Home energy loans of **\$1,000 to \$7,500** at 5.99% APR fixed for homeowners with **LOW income\***

**\*To prove eligibility for Efficiency Maine income-based options:** upload a copy of most recent tax return and fill out online [form](#) OR give permission for a qualifying program to verify your eligibility to Efficiency Maine directly (*HEAP, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or MaineCare*).

# When survey respondents were asked about incentives related to energy efficiency, they responded...



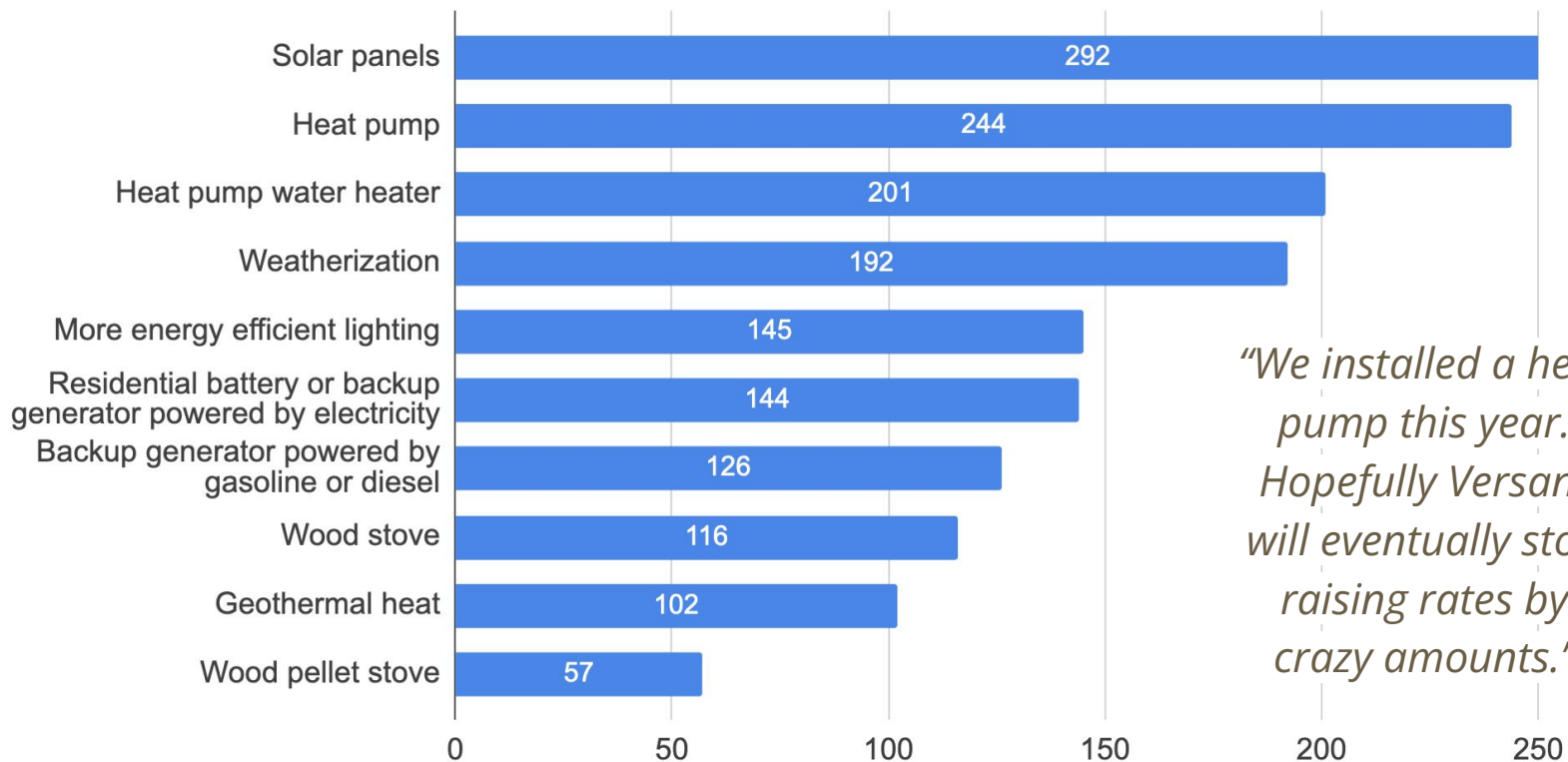
# Although survey respondents did not express much confusion about incentives, older populations expressed confusion in focus groups...

*“So much information out there, it was so confusing after reading everything to see what I could qualify for. After reviewing everything, I didn’t even know what I was eligible for!”*

*“Need step by step process on what to do first.”*

*“Paperwork is a huge barrier and have categorical programs, only for x, y, z... creates a lot of barrier to entry.”*

# What alternative energy/energy efficiency options are people most interested in?



*"We installed a heat pump this year. Hopefully Versant will eventually stop raising rates by crazy amounts."*

**Q2: What barriers exist for accessing HEAP & LIAP benefits and weatherization services? What are the characteristics of eligible households receiving/not receiving these benefits?**

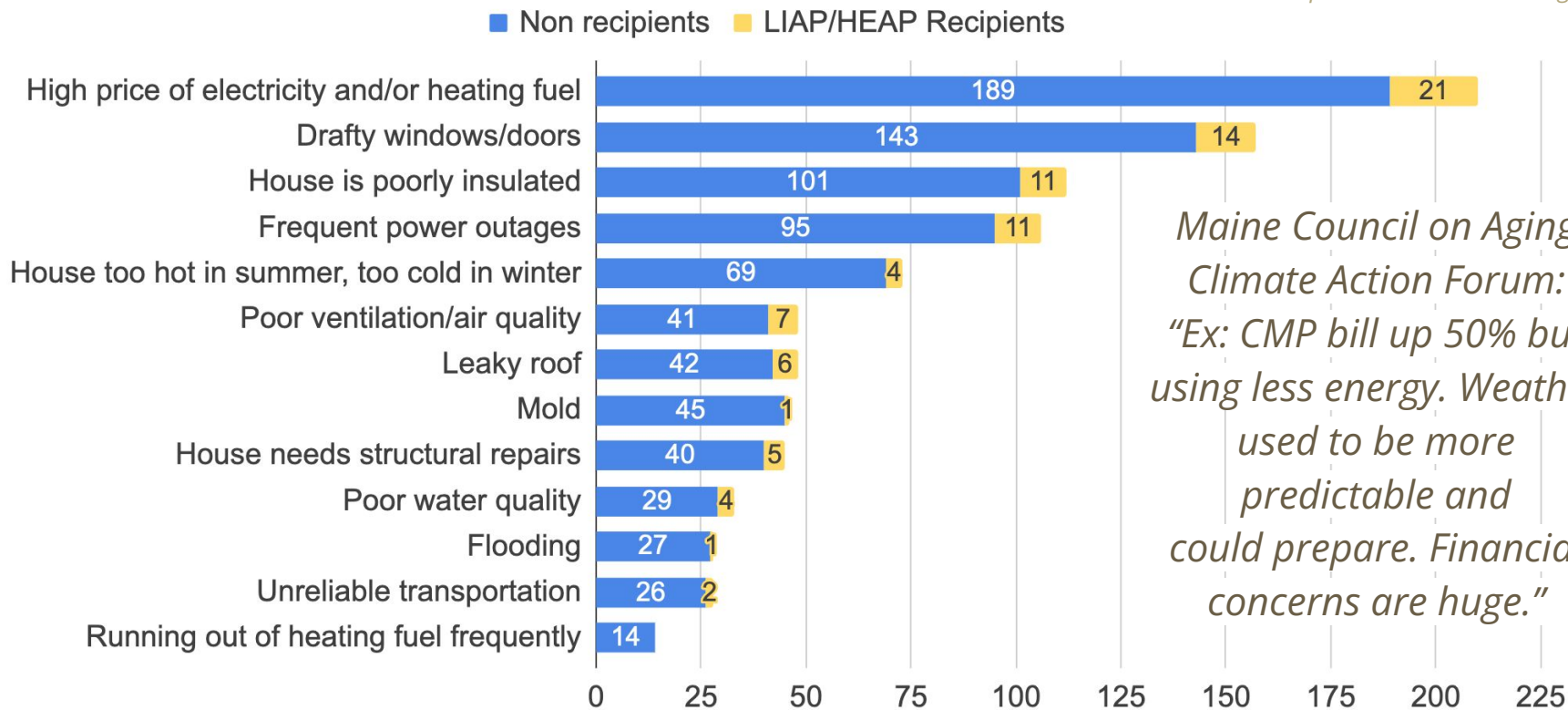




# People experience multiple energy-related problems in their homes



Photo: <https://windowdressers.org/volunteer/>



*Maine Council on Aging  
Climate Action Forum:  
"Ex: CMP bill up 50% but  
using less energy. Weather  
used to be more  
predictable and  
could prepare. Financial  
concerns are huge."*

# LiHEAP & LIAP benefits can be difficult to understand/access

- Since rules changed, installs in the Lincoln area have gone from 300-350 down to 40
- Many people don't qualify for assistance but still have a hard time affording weatherization services
- There is fear that new projects will be technologically challenging, especially for older adults
- Many people do not understand or are not aware of the available assistance, especially older adults
- Even when they are aware, there is a generational concern with not wanting to "accept a handout"; "don't want to take from someone else" "other people need more than I"
- Drafty and poorly weatherized homes and heating security are commonly cited problems in Washington County

# It is difficult to serve the full demand for energy assistance...

## CAP agency:

*"We are getting the word out, but then funding is cut. Hard to not be able to help everyone who needs it. We do significant outreach into the community – and get into the buildings where older people live in congregate settings. There are a lot of funding issues. We need assistance in outreach, could be full time job in itself."*

# Q3: What awareness and barriers exist regarding energy efficient building codes?

- *“As an independent auditor, I don’t make any money off of what I tell people, it’s just advice”* but there are private contractors who are incentivized to promote a specific company– *“most insulation contractors were relieved when that Efficiency Maine rebate got taken away”*
- Enforcement and understanding in rural areas is lacking
- The attendees worried that the general population of builders are not equipped enough to address their retrofit needs without worrying that it could cause an unhealthy home.



Interior of an efficient post and beam home, constructed by Burnham & Lobo Builders in Freeport. It was constructed using a continuous, air-tight, well-insulated exterior outer shell with R-35 walls and an R-65 roof.  
Photo by Tim Greenway.

*Training in Fort Kent  
by Randy Rand of  
Passivhaus*



**Q4: What awareness, preferences, & barriers exist related to different approaches to community solar and residential distributed energy (solar, wind, battery); especially for affordable housing & renters?**



# When asked about their preferences, participants recommended...

- Building transportation infrastructure and encourage dense housing in walkable communities ahead of increased population that will come with climate change and climate refugees
- Solar farms on capped landfills, superfund sites
- Reducing tax burden and municipal energy costs for communities
- Citizens are concerned about the aesthetic impacts of wind farms

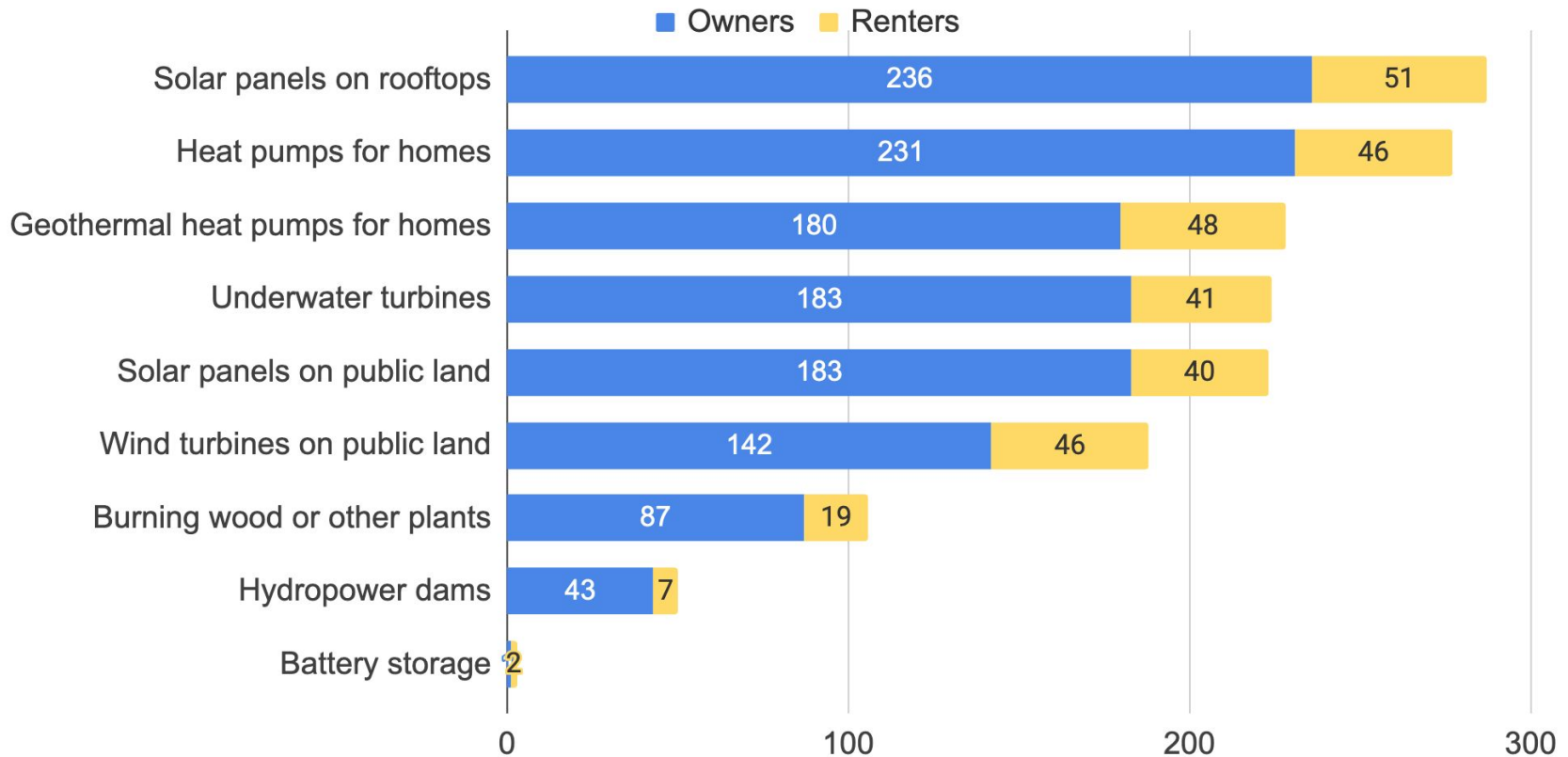


The Mars Hill Wind Farm atop Mars Hill in northern Maine. Credit: Michael Surran / Wikimedia Commons



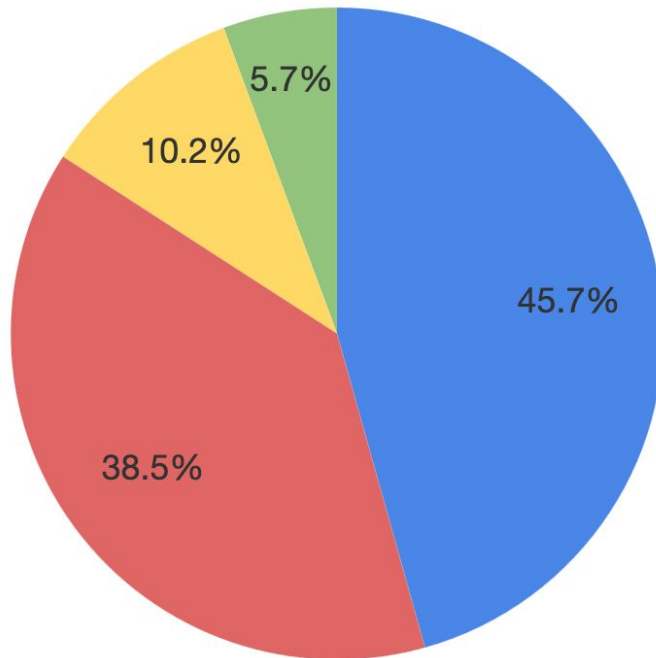
Photo by J. Berk/NRCM

# When asked, “Which renewable energy options would you like to see your community pursue?”



# When asked, “What might make it difficult for your local government to support or adopt renewable energy options?”

- Related to costs/funding
- Related to politics/public perception
- Related to lack of knowledge
- Other



***Other concerns that came up frequently:***  
*Lack of capacity in small towns, no room for infrastructure, impacts on nature/wildlife/viewshed*



**Q5: What awareness/understanding exists of indoor air quality issues due to fuel combustion inside the home, particularly in poorly or improperly weatherized homes? What opportunities exist to increase healthy air through improved ventilation, weatherization, and beneficial electrification; as well as idling?**



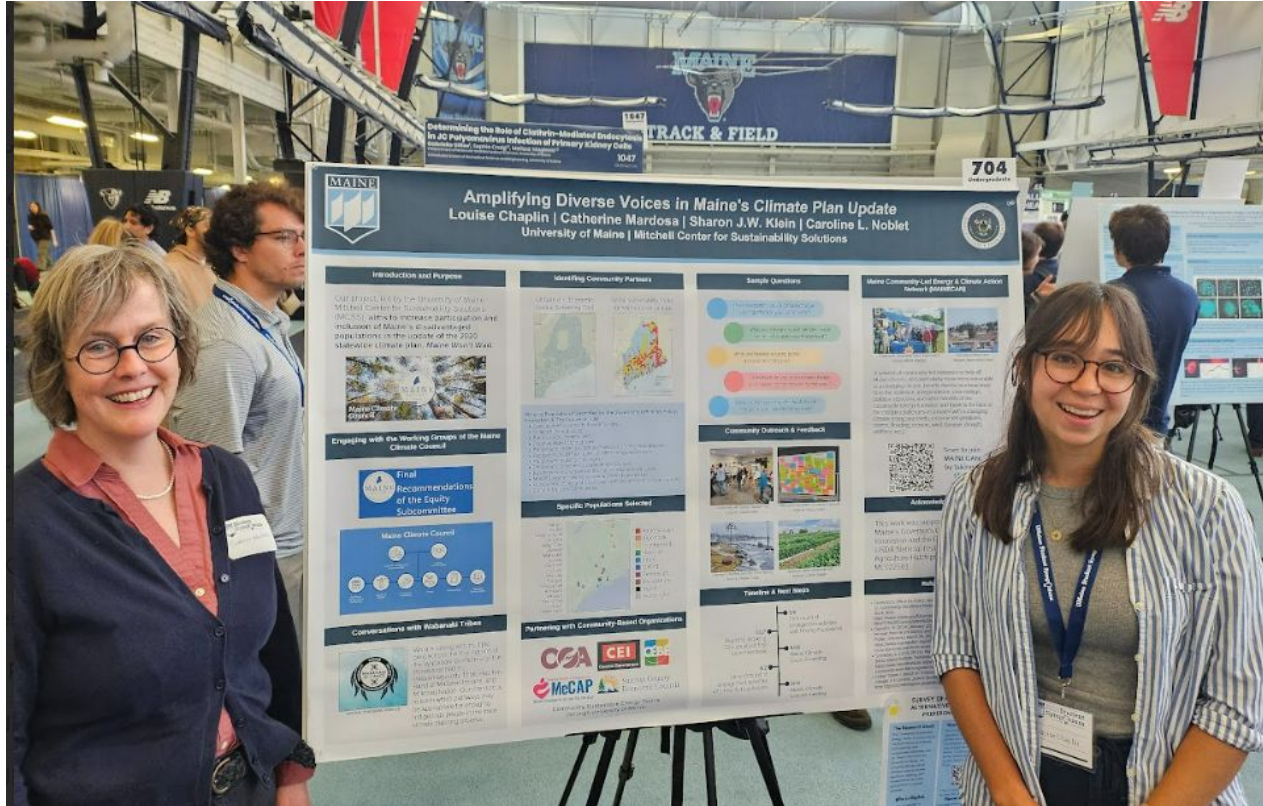
# When it comes to indoor air quality...

- People in low income residential facilities commented on poor temperature control; drafty windows, faulty heating systems, a lack of air conditioning.
- This is great concern with many contractors; they feel the understanding in the industry isn't there or they can't find a trade partner to consider indoor air quality or install an appropriate system. Training more people to complete this work is needed.

# What's next....As you work on your recommendations

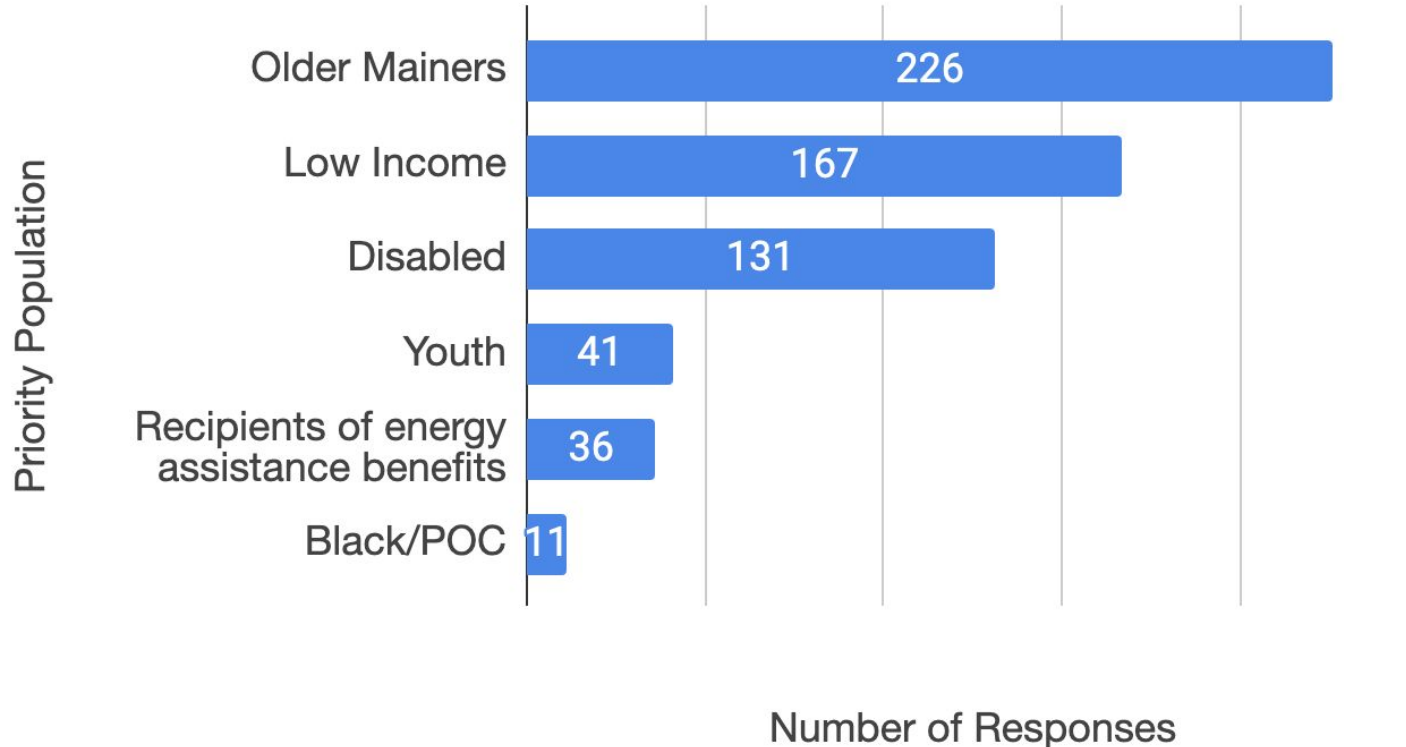
1. Cross-WG Learning: as we do presentations to the next 3 Working Groups this week, GOPIF will share presentations with WG co-chairs
  - a. Buildings, Infrastructure & Housing WG had some similar topics to Energy WG
  - b. Transportation WG had topics related to some Buildings, Infrastructure & Housing themes
2. How can we be helpful to you? (anything you saw here today that you'd like follow up on?)
3. Second round of engagement activities -- Summer 2024
  - a. Are there groups you really need to hear from, or hear more from?

# Thank you!



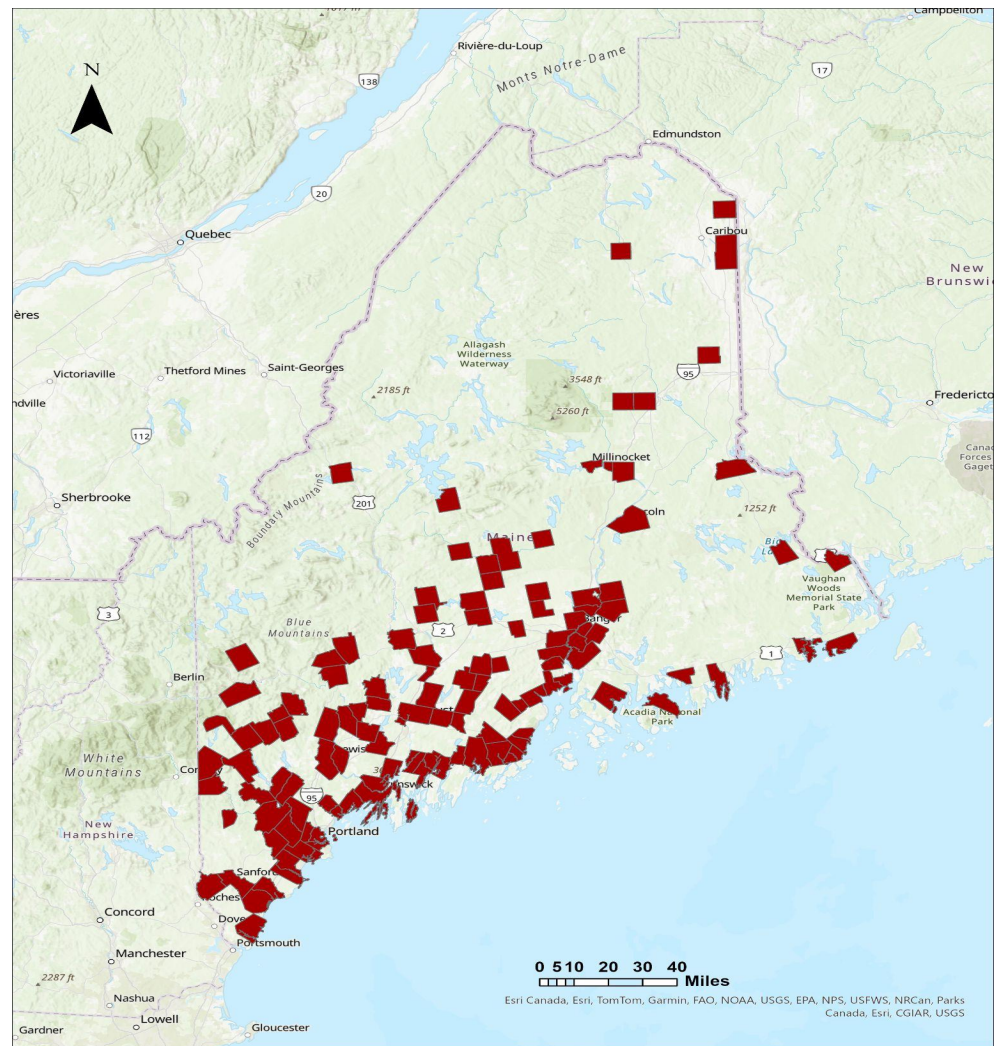
# Appendix 1: Who responded to our survey?

Priority Population Survey Responses



# Priority Population

- Community members from each of these communities participated in our survey



# Priority Population

- Members of these disadvantaged communities answered questions specifically about Buildings, Infrastructure & Housing topics

