

Rural Electric Cooperative Toolkit Student Appendix

[**Context:** New Economy Coalition Rural Electric Co-op Toolkit--BETA version (yes it is a lot!) we're in the process of refining this resource list and providing write ups of the content, recommendations for the top few recommended readings in each category, AND Power Shift Network is interested in completing **an appendix for students** to provide more about how students could get involved in rural electric co-op work with an FAQ.]

Purpose: Introduce the Toolkit and REC organizing as an opportunity for students]

Introduction

The introduction should answer these questions:

- What is an REC?
- Why is REC organizing a good opportunity?
- How could students organize to change their REC?
- Some stories of REC reform
- Intro to PSN and member orgs working on this

A rural electric co-op (REC) is a cooperative owned by its members that distributes electricity to its member-owners. RECs are governed by a board of directors that should be elected by the member-owners. The REC bylaws should lay out election and other governance policies and should be available to any member-owners--some RECs post them online and others make them available by request. Most RECs were formed by rural farmers/landowners (overwhelmingly white and male) in the mid-1900s when Investor-Owned Utilities (IOUs) were not willing to electrify rural areas due to a reduced rate of profit because of the lower density of rural areas. The Rural Electrification Administration (REA) was formed by the federal government in 1936 to catalyze electrification of rural areas through providing loans, support, and technical assistance to the formation and ongoing operation of electric co-ops. There are now more than 800 rural electric co-ops that serve around 56% of the US landmass.

Rural electric cooperative member-owners have the ability to turn their cooperatives with \$45B in annual revenue into engines of the new economy. Some cooperatives are already leading on innovative programs that are building blocks for the new economy including: inclusive financing for energy efficiency, broadband access, community solar, and more, but rural electric cooperatives (RECs) get about 75% of their power from coal and there is much more that they could do to support clean energy and bring economic and other benefits to their member-owners.

In 2008, a member revolt at Pedernales Electric Co-op outside of Austin, Texas and subsequent takeover of the board by reformers shifted the co-op from corruption and an anti-solar stance to becoming the first co-op with a policy encouraging rooftop solar and a commitment to 30%

renewable generation by 2020. With engaged member-owners pushing co-op leadership to better serve them, co-ops in Kentucky, North Carolina, and Arkansas have initiated inclusive energy efficiency financing programs that have already created dozens of local jobs, directed millions of dollars in investment, improved people's comfort in their homes, and reduced their energy bills -- while simultaneously dropping emissions and peak capacity requirements at the co-ops. Co-ops can and have become champions of local renewable energy and efficiency, but it requires their member-owners to organize and regain control of co-op governance.

Students and youth in REC territory have opportunities to organize other students, faculty and staff at their schools as well as broader community members who are also REC member-owners in these new economy campaigns. They also have opportunities to leverage the power of large institutional REC member-owners (like their school) to make changes. Campaigns could be focused on electing new Directors to the REC's Board to promote clean energy, efficiency, better governance, local economic development, and more.

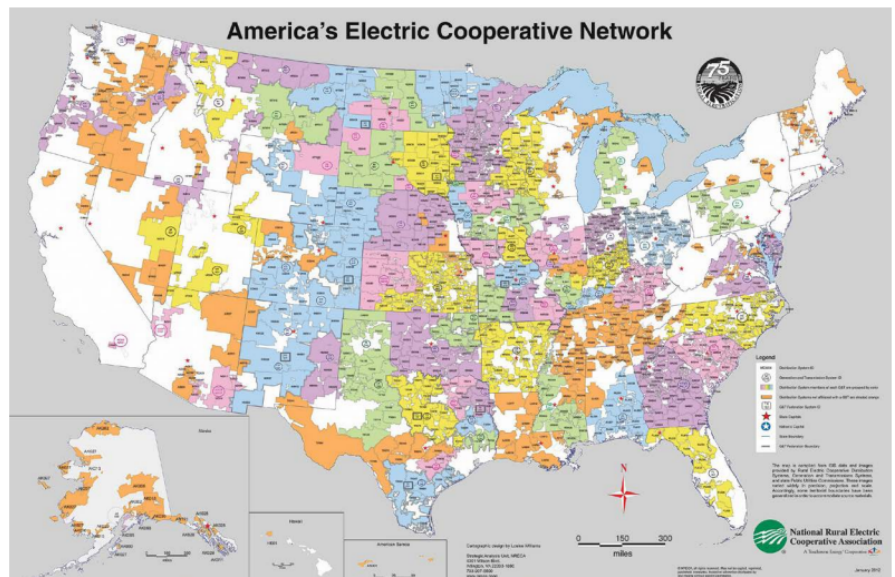
FAQ

Where are RECs?

More than 800 RECs serve 42 million Americans in 47 states covering 56% of the land area of the US. Mostly in rural areas, but also in areas that used to be rural but are now suburban including around Atlanta, GA; Minneapolis, MN; New Orleans, LA; and Denver, CO.

How do I know if I am in an REC territory?

- Electric Bill:** If you pay an electric bill to a utility with “electric cooperative” or “EMC” = electric membership corporation in the name, then you are a member-owner of a cooperative. Note that some electric cooperatives have names that don't include EMC or cooperative. For example: Connexus Energy near Minneapolis, MN. You may have to pull up the website of your electricity provider and look on the About page to see if they say they are an electric cooperative. Also, if they say they are a member of Touchstone Energy Cooperatives (a marketing cooperative that most electric co-ops belong to--image below) or they have a logo like electricity turning into rolling farmland on their page (see green circle below)--this is the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), then they are a cooperative.

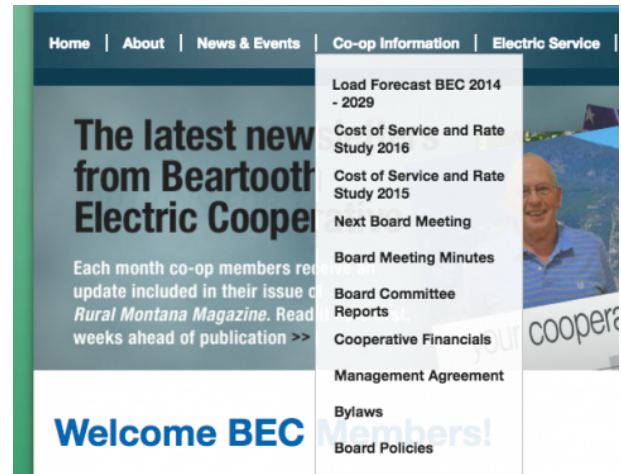




- **State Electric Co-op Association Map:** You could also search for: “[YOUR STATE] electric cooperative association map” to find a more detailed map for your state and determine if your provider is a co-op.
- **State Map PDFs & GIS Files:** You can access [PDF maps of electric co-ops in every state and some additional publicly available GIS files here](#) in a Spreadsheet that We Own It has put together.
- **Contact We Own It:** You could contact Liz at We Own It: liz@weown.it if you have questions. She has access to a more detailed map and can look up an address to see if it is in co-op territory.

What are examples of co-op reform to increase transparency?

- [Beartooth: A Beacon of Transparency.](#)
- [Cobb members stop coal plant, end corruption and go solar](#)
- [Pedernales members end corruption, set renewable target](#)



[Power Shift Network](#) is a national network of youth-led and youth-centered organizations working for a safe climate and just future where communities are thriving and own their power - whether that power is electrical, economic, social, or political. We've been working with We Own It and other organizations anchoring conversations on the ground and in larger network spaces (like the New Economy Coalition!) to create space for, and identify questions specific to, student and youth organizing work. We're building interest internally for youth organizing around rural-electric cooperative work - if you are interested in joining the youth-focused conversation, feel free to contact Sean Estelle, PSN Network Coordinator, at sean@powershift.org. You can also join the Power Shift Network Slack by clicking through to bit.ly/psnslack and joining #rec-muni-energy-dem or applying to join the Power Shift Network by filling this [Google Form out](#).