



Indian Country Energy and Infrastructure Working Group (ICEIWG)

March 10, 2026, Virtual Session | External Report

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Executive Summary

The Indian Country Energy and Infrastructure Working Group (ICEIWG) works collaboratively with the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Office of Indian Energy (IE) focusing on energy access, Tribal energy resource development and resource assessments, and power generation that support the DOE statutory authorizations and requirements of Title V of the Energy Policy Act of 2005.

ICEIWG Tribal representatives and DOE leadership virtually convened on Tuesday, March 10, 2026, from 12:00 PM–3:00 PM EST, to reaffirm the Working Group’s mission, share IE priorities, and exchange insights on energy sovereignty, grid reliability, and infrastructure modernization. The meeting provided structured introductions, an overview of leadership priorities, and an opportunity for Tribal members to share their energy histories, current challenges, and long-term goals to inform future ICEIWG activities.

Members highlighted near-term needs in hydropower upkeep and reliability, microgrids and resilience hubs, transmission access, permitting clarity, fractionated title challenges, and pragmatic pathways for renewable and conventional energy development. The session also surfaced opportunities around data centers, with emphasis on low-water cooling, siting, and grid impacts; workforce development; and interagency coordination to streamline financing, permitting, and technical assistance.

Discussion Themes

DOE IE Priorities

Director Eric Mahroum opened the session by reaffirming DOE IE’s commitment to strengthening nation-to-nation relationships and partnering closely with Tribal Nations. Director Mahroum introduced IE leadership and outlined priorities focused on expanding affordable, reliable, and secure electricity; fostering effective public-private partnerships; strengthening communication and outreach; and supporting Tribal workforce development. He emphasized the disproportionate energy burdens many Tribal communities face and highlighted ongoing collaboration with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, including efforts toward improving interagency coordination and advancing Tribal energy projects.

Energy Sovereignty & Reliability

Participants underscored the inseparability of energy sovereignty from Tribal sovereignty. Recurring needs include ensuring reliable baseload power, reducing high energy burdens, and addressing outage frequency, especially for remote and islanded systems. Leaders described how resilience strategies (e.g., diversified generation portfolios and microgrids) are essential to maintain critical services during wildfires and severe weather events.

Infrastructure Modernization: Hydropower, Transmission, and Microgrids

Several communities emphasized aging hydro assets requiring refurbishment and dam safety and operational upgrades. Others noted constrained transmission capacity that limits development potential, with projects advancing to relieve congestion and enable new generation. Microgrid initiatives, which are often paired with resilience centers, are being pursued to provide dependable power, heating/cooling, and essential services during emergencies.

Permitting, Fractionation, and Rights-of-Way

Tribes highlighted practical barriers including fragmented land interests, complex leasing and right-of-way renewals, and process ambiguity across jurisdictions. There is interest in models to consolidate fractional ownership interests; modernize title processes; and clarify tax and jurisdiction frameworks to improve investment certainty while protecting cultural resources. Emerging approaches, such as buy-back mechanisms and unified negotiation resolutions, were noted as potential pathways.

Balanced Resource Development & Critical Minerals

Communities discussed opportunities that span renewables (e.g., solar, wind, geothermal, hydro) and conventional resources, such as oil and gas, emphasizing environmental safeguards, water stewardship, and the importance of transparent, long-term economic benefits. Some Tribes reported exploration of helium, lithium, and geothermal prospects while balancing transmission access and market realities.

Data Centers & Advanced Loads

Multiple participants reported approaches from companies interested in data center siting. Tribes highlighted requirements for early engagement on water use, siting constraints, interconnection, and cultural resource protection; some requested DOE support in road-mapping NEPA and Section 106 considerations and encouraging low-water cooling technologies. Others expressed interest in AI-enabled efficiency and grid optimization. DOE noted ongoing IE resources and a public webinar recording to support Tribal economic development around data centers.

Workforce & Capacity Building

Workforce development remains central to achieving energy sovereignty. Participants described efforts to build local technical capacity, standardize energy-efficient building codes, and expand utility-scale and community-scale project management expertise, supported by practical technical assistance.

Actionable Items

The following are collated actionable items identified from the meeting minutes:



1. Director Mahroum announced that IE is seeking a voluntary Tribal Co-Chair to help plan meetings and guide discussions for ICEIWG. Interested Tribal representatives were asked to contact Dr. Tommy Jones by **March 17, 2026**.
 - a. Chairman Bobby Gonzalez volunteered for the Co-Chair role and will serve in this role.
2. If applicable, ICEIWG members to respond to DOE’s search for Tribal Nation with adequate facilities to host **2027 Tribal Energy Summit & Program Review** by contacting Katrina Pielli (katrina.pielli@hq.doe.gov).
3. Tribal members were invited to attend the following upcoming events:
 - a. Director Mahroum invited Tribal leaders to attend **BIA’s Tribal Energy Summit**, the week of April 28th in Houston, Texas.
 - b. Upcoming **RES Conference, March 23-26, 2026, in Las Vegas**, where Director Mahroum will participate in a fireside chat with Chairman Derek Watchman.
4. Schedule **upcoming ICEIWG Meeting**, planned to convene in-person in the coming months. Focus upcoming sessions to identify shared priorities and shape a coordinated workplan.

Resources Shared

- Technical Assistance Request Portal: [Request Technical Assistance | Department of Energy](#)
- IE Data Center Lead Contact: Elisah Vandenbussche (elisah.vandenbussche@hq.doe.gov)
- Link to IE Data Center webinar recording and slides: [Beyond Land Leases: Harnessing Data Centers for Tribal Economic Development | Department of Energy](#)”

Meeting Agenda

<u>TIME</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
12:00 - 12:45 PM	Welcome Call to Order, IE Introductions, Remarks from Chair Director Mahroum, Director Priorities
12:45 - 2:00 PM	ICEIWG Member Introductions
2:00 - 2:50 PM	Open Discussion and Q&A
2:50 - 3:00 PM	Wrap up and discussion on preparing for next meeting