

Summary of Stakeholder Feedback:

Tacoma Power engaged in focused one on one conversations with local non-profit organizations, academic researchers, local public agencies as well as community members with lived experience in poverty to gather diverse perspectives on the definition of “vulnerable populations”. Participants were also invited to help shape the indicators and metrics used to track progress on the CEIP goals. Their input provided valuable insights that have shaped Tacoma Power's approach to identifying and reducing burdens on vulnerable populations.

Stakeholder input revealed a range of perspectives on defining "vulnerable populations" and the following key themes emerged:

1. Challenges with Existing Indices and Traditional Definitions:

- Public agencies highlighted the limitations of the commonly used Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) due to its reliance on factors like race and English proficiency, which the community doesn't view as "negative" characteristics. They emphasized the need for people-first language and a focus on specific vulnerabilities (e.g., at-risk of heat death) rather than labeling entire groups as "vulnerable." They specifically cautioned against using biological factors in defining vulnerability, as this runs the risk of reinforcing discriminatory stereotypes and negatively impacting the self-perception of communities deemed "vulnerable." They also encouraged the use of individual indicators over using composite indices with correlated components.
- Lived experience participants stressed that income-based definitions often miss crucial nuances. They highlighted the impact of family responsibilities, health conditions, and the ***cumulative burden of expenses*** like housing, transportation, and healthcare.

2. Expanding the Understanding of Vulnerability:

- Non-profit stakeholders emphasized the importance of considering intersectional factors beyond income, such as race, ethnicity, age, disability, geographic location, and language proficiency.
- Multiple stakeholders cautioned against solely relying on location-based definitions (e.g., Designated Areas of Concern, Equity Index), as these often mask the impact of vulnerable population pockets located in affluent areas.
- Stakeholders from community philanthropy emphasized the need for data-driven metrics to identify vulnerable populations, as some individuals may not self-identify as vulnerable due to cultural factors or personal experiences – particularly within immigrant communities.

3. Focusing on Root Causes and Systemic Issues:

- Both non-profits and public agencies advocated for a strengths-based approach that considers the systemic causes of vulnerability, such as poor housing laws and lack of access to resources. And nearly all stakeholders highlighted the importance of understanding the root causes of income inequality and the cumulative burden of essential expenses.

Guidelines for Defining Vulnerable Populations

Based on the stakeholder feedback and CETA's emphasis on the addressing the harms of fossil fuels and climate change, Tacoma Power should adopt a multi-faceted approach to defining vulnerable populations in its clean energy implementation plan that:

1. **Prioritizes Direct Measures of Harm:** The definition of vulnerable populations should prioritize data and indicators that *directly* measure the harms of fossil fuel pollution and climate change. This includes:
 - a. **Urban Heat Island Mapping and Data:** Explore availability of high-resolution urban heat island mapping to identify communities most vulnerable to extreme heat.
 - b. **Air Quality Monitoring and Data:** Collect and analyze air quality data, focusing on pollutants directly linked to fossil fuel combustion (e.g., particulate matter, NOx, ozone), particularly in areas where vulnerable communities reside.
 - c. **Rising Costs due to Climate Change Impacts and Mitigation Efforts:**
 - i. Cost of stressed infrastructure due to rising temperatures and/or increased cooling loads
 - ii. Costs of decarbonization efforts: electrification, clean energy transformation, etc.
2. **Uses Indirect Indicators to Understand and Address Underlying Vulnerabilities:** While prioritizing direct measures, Tacoma Power should use the indirectly related indicators (financial, social, demographic) to understand *why* certain communities are at greater risk. These factors contribute to disproportionate exposure to pollution and reduced capacity to cope with climate impacts. This understanding should inform targeted interventions and policies.
3. **Avoids a Single, Static Definition:** Vulnerability is dynamic and can change over time. Tacoma Power should avoid creating a single, static definition. Instead, it should adopt a flexible and iterative approach, using data and community feedback to continuously refine its understanding of vulnerability and to adapt its programs and policies accordingly.