REGULATORY SANDBOXES AND UTILITY ADOPTION OF ADVANCED GRID TECHNOLOGIES

INNOVATION WEBINAR

August 13, 2025
2:00 to 3:00 p.m. ET

Free & open to the public!

NARUC CPI Innovation Webinar

Moderator: Hon. Erik Helland,
Iowa Utilities Commission

Julia Dumaine,
Connecticut Public Utilities Regulatory Authority

Grace Relf,
Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory

Hon. Riley Allen,
Vermont Public Utility Commission

About NARUC

- Founded in 1889, the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC) is a non-profit organization dedicated to representing the state public service commissions who regulate the utilities that provide essential services such as energy, telecommunications, power, water, and transportation.
- NARUC's members include all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.
- Our mission is to serve the public interest by improving the quality and effectiveness of public utility regulation.
- For more information, visit: www.naruc.org

About NARUC CPI

- The NARUC Center for Partnerships & Innovation (CPI) builds relationships, develops resources, and delivers training to assist state commissions contending with complex current and emerging issues.
- CPI is funded by cooperative agreements with the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST).
- CPI conducts work across five key energy areas and many topics within each: generation; transmission; distribution; customers; and critical infrastructure preparedness, response, and resilience.
- Among other events, CPI hosts a monthly innovation webinar series on a wide range of timely topics.
- For more information, visit: www.naruc.org/cpi

Upcoming Events

Virtual Events:

- **Data Access Policy Tools**, September 15, 2:00 – 3:00 PM EST
- **September Innovation Webinar – Hit me with your Best Bot: AI for Regulators**, September 25, 2:00 – 3:00 PM EST
- **NCEP Webinar Series: State Agency Roles in Load Growth**, Fall dates TBA soon

Upcoming In-Person Events:

- **Cybersecurity Training for State Regulatory Commissions**, Nashville, TN, October 15 – 17, 2025
- **NARUC Annual Meeting and Education Conference**, Seattle, WA, November 9 – 12, 2025

See the full list of events and access registration links at: www.naruc.org/events/event-list/

Today's Speakers

Regulatory Sandboxes and Other Processes to Expedite Utility Adoption of Advanced Grid Technologies

Grace Relf, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory

August 13, 2025

This work was funded by the U.S. Department of Energy, Office of Electricity, under Contract No. DE-AC02-05CH11231.

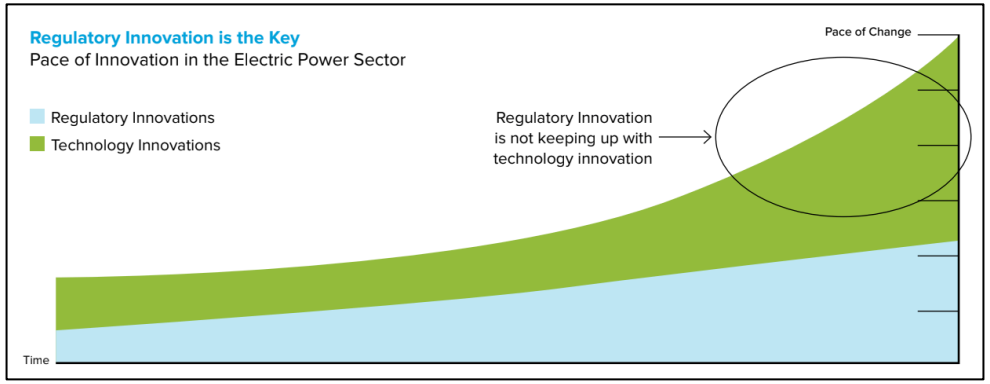
Agenda

- Introduction and Background
  - Project motivation and context
  - Berkeley Lab's research
- The Landscape of Regulatory Sandboxes
  - Defining regulatory sandboxes
  - Sandboxes in the U.S. and abroad
- Examples of specific projects resulting from sandboxes
- Wrap up
  - Findings
  - Emerging best practices

Introduction and Background

Project Motivation and Context

- Load growth, aging assets, variable energy resources, and increasingly severe and frequent weather events are challenging utilities to simultaneously:
  - Expand T&D capacity
  - Improve asset management and utilization
  - Adopt new operational practices
  - Expand resilience programs
  - Maintain energy affordability
- Traditional regulatory processes can discourage utility interest in testing and deploying advanced grid technologies to help meet these challenges.
- ***Regulatory sandboxes* aim to bridge the gap between need and opportunity to deliver solutions at scale.**



Source: McDonnell, Gorman, and Field 2022

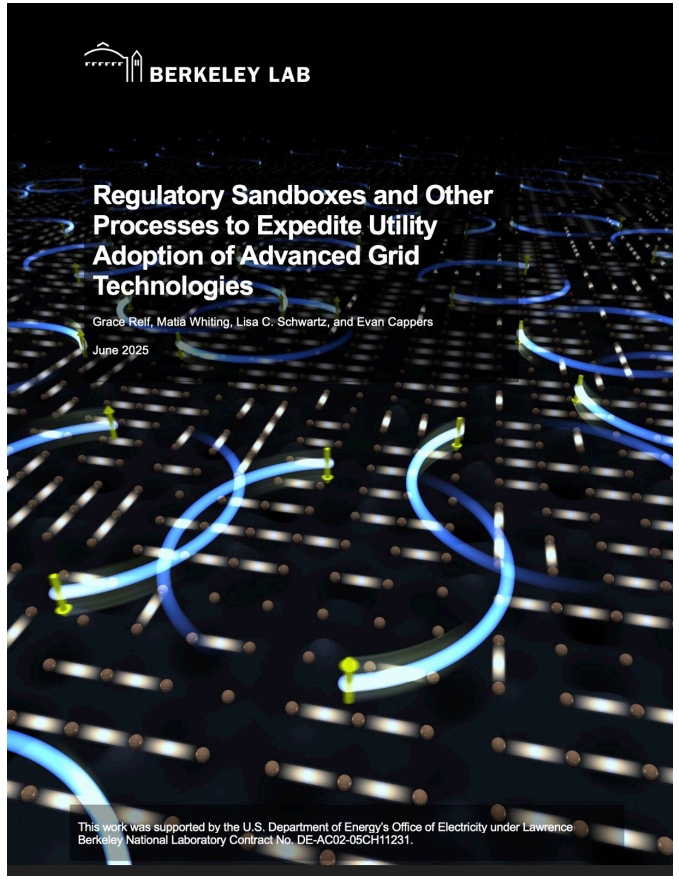
Berkeley Lab Research

Berkeley Lab published research on regulatory sandboxes and other processes to expedite adoption of advanced grid technologies.

The research:

- Assesses the need for, and barriers to, utility innovation
- Identifies regulatory sandboxes and related processes
- Assesses emerging best practices

Berkeley Lab is creating an accompanying toolkit to support states looking to develop a sandbox (forthcoming) and can provide assistance to state PUCs.



Research available at: https://emp.lbl.gov/publications/regulatory-sandboxes-and-other

Report Methodology

- Literature review & synthesis of common and key findings
- With E9 Insight, comprehensive review of regulatory proceedings & deep-dive into regulatory filings, utility innovation webpages, pilot databases, and other sources
- Structured interviews with utilities, regulators, consumer advocates, industry trade groups, and consultants
- Analysis and synthesis of findings

Organizations Interviewed
American Public Power Association (APPA)
Connecticut Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA)
Current Energy Group
Duke Energy Corporation (via written correspondence)
Hawaiian Electric (HECO)
Hawaii Public Utilities Commission (HPUC)
Green Mountain Power (GMP)
Public Staff – North Carolina Utilities Commission
San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E)
United Illuminating
Vermont Public Utilities Commission (VT PUC)
Vermont Electric Power Company (VELCO)
WATT Coalition / Grid Strategies

The Landscape of Regulatory Sandboxes

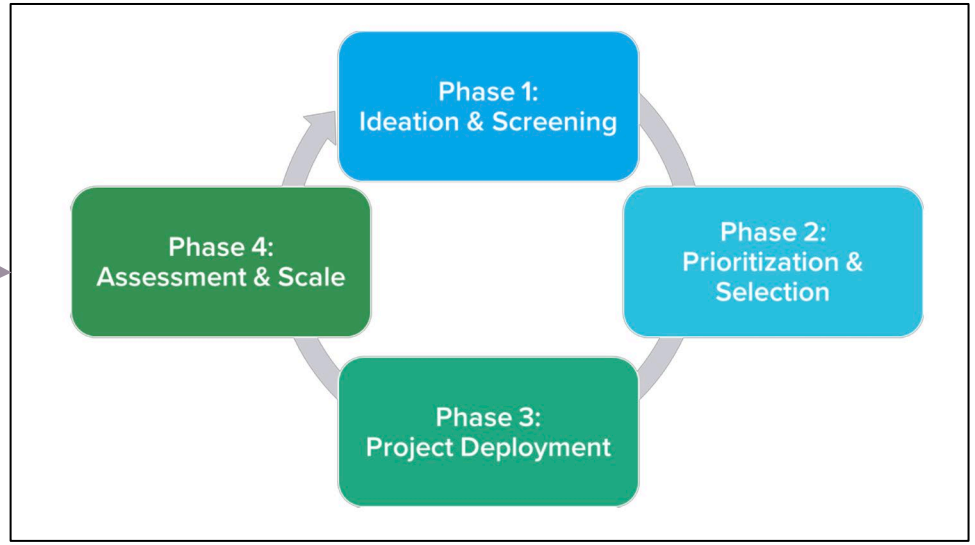
Defining Regulatory Sandboxes

Regulatory Sandboxes

Mechanisms that provide a structured environment for testing new technologies and business approaches under modified rules to increase the speed of adoption

Example

The Connecticut Innovative Energy Solutions (IES) sandbox mechanism selects cutting-edge project proposals to run for a 12- to 18-month trial period before assessing results and quickly determining scaling strategies.



Source: CT PURA

Taxonomy of Sandbox-Type Mechanisms

Funding Opportunity

Funding carveout for innovative grid transformation projects

Pilot Process

Activities to improve how pilot projects are approved and managed

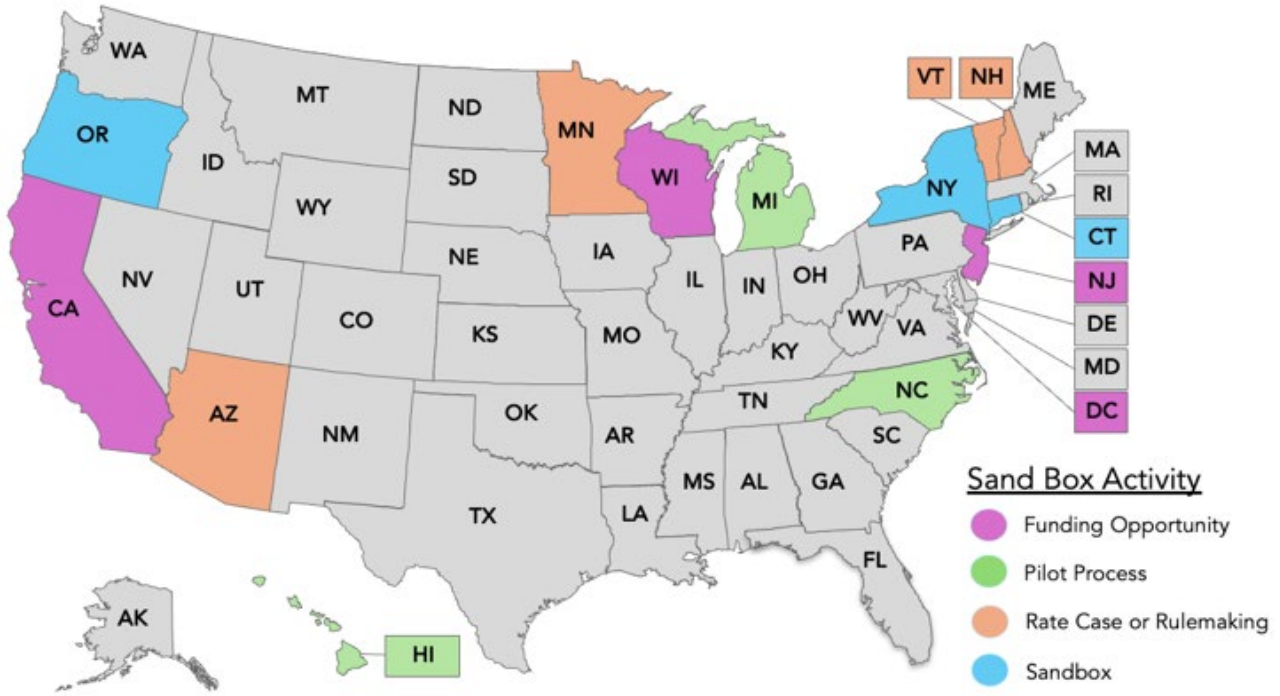
Rate Case or Rulemaking

Vehicles for broader innovation efforts that may include reforms including sandbox-like initiatives

Regulatory Sandbox

Mechanism that provides a structured environment for testing new technologies and business approaches under modified rules to increase the speed of adoption

U.S. States Exploring and Implementing Sandbox-Type Mechanisms



State	Program
National	American Public Power Association (APPA) DEED Program
Arizona (not adopted)	Innovations and Technological Developments
California	EPIC Program
Connecticut	Innovative Energy Solutions
Hawaii	Innovative Pilot Framework
Michigan	New Technologies and Business Models
Minnesota (not adopted)	Rate Case Pilot Projects
North Carolina	Innovation Prototyping Process
New Hampshire (not adopted)	Grid Transformation and Enablement Program
New Jersey	Clean Tech Grant Programs and Future Regulatory Sandbox
New York	Reforming the Energy Vision Demonstration Projects
Oregon	Smart Grid Testbed
Vermont	Innovative Pilot Program
Washington, DC	PowerPath DC Pilot Project Fund
Wisconsin	Energy Innovation Grant Program

Sandbox Examples

Connecticut Innovative Energy Solutions

- Reduces barriers for deploying new technologies and to facilitate collaboration between product innovators and utilities.
- Follows a four-phase process: ideation and screening, prioritization and selection, project deployment, and assessment and scaling.
- Uses thematic program cycles, three participation pathways and an innovation advisory council.

New York Reforming the Energy Vision Demos

- Allows utilities to develop new business models and effectively unlock new revenue streams and private investments.
- Encourages flexibility, innovation, partnerships, customer engagement, market creation, scalability and cost recovery.

Hawaii Innovative Pilot Framework

- Expedites review of pilot proposals for new technologies, programs, and business models that support goals in areas such as resilience.
- Complements elements of a performance-based regulation framework targeted at cost control.

Notable Examples from Abroad

- The U.K's Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (OFGEM) developed an Energy Regulation Sandbox in 2017 as part of its performance-based regulation framework.
  - The sandbox enables demonstrations and trials in the regulated electric and gas sectors, particularly those that may require modified or reduced regulations in order to move forward.
- The Ontario Energy Board established an Innovation Sandbox in 2016 to support achievement of the goals identified in its Strategic Blueprint document.
  - The sandbox aims to better support innovation by introducing a simpler, less adversarial, and quicker way to trial new technologies and services.
- The Singapore Energy Market Authority created a regulatory sandbox in 2017.
  - The sandbox is a means of formalizing a previous effort to identify regulatory barriers to innovation on an ad hoc basis.

Source: OEB

Examples of Specific Projects Resulting from Regulatory Sandboxes

Project Example: Undergrounding Low-Voltage Distribution Lines

Consumers Energy is running a pilot for Undergrounding Low-Voltage Distribution (LVD) Lines, which will underground certain sections of overhead lines.

- The pilot seeks to collect data on the actual reliability and cost impacts of undergrounding LVD lines.
  - Consumers expects to spend $3.7 million and will compare costs to other reliability efforts.
  - Consumers will study actual reliability improvements.

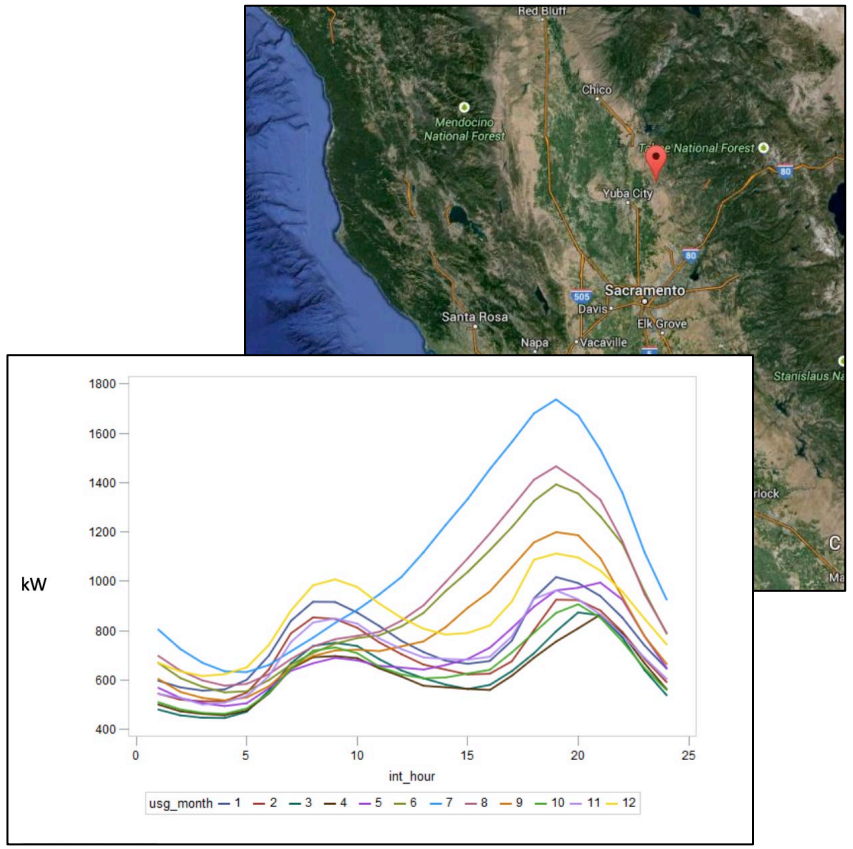
Sources: MI PSC, Consumers Energy

Project Example: Distributed Storage for T&D Cost Reduction

Pacific Gas & Electric deployed energy storage at a substation to deliver autonomous distribution peak shaving.

- The project successfully demonstrated the ability to provide 500 kW of loading relief over 4 hours to delay T&D capacity expansions while maintaining or improving reliability.
- PG&E found that one ~30 MW storage solution can provide $5-15M in cost savings from avoided transmission upgrades.
- The project informed storage procurement practices, operational requirements and practices, and investments in distribution management controls.

Project Location and Average Substation Daily Load By Month



Source: CEC EPIC Database

Wrap Up

Findings

Sandboxes have grown over time in the U.S. electricity sector

- 12 ongoing examples of sandbox mechanisms
- Sandbox types are varied

Sandboxes have demonstrated value

- Interviewees expressed enthusiasm for sandboxes
- Sandboxes are particularly good for creating a willingness to learn and an environment for experimentation

Programmatic focuses are varied

- Sandbox programs most commonly focus on demand-side resources
- Sandboxes can enable deployment of customer-sited batteries, distribution management technologies, modeling tools, and microgrids

Sandbox design can be improved to increase impact

- A stronger focus on advanced grid technologies may encourage more sandbox projects
- Scaling of programs isn't well documented and may need more focus

Sandboxes can:

- **Advance innovation**
- **Increase information collection and sharing**
- **Improve economic outcomes**
- **Enhance grid reliability and resilience**
- **Better meet customer needs**
- **Expand access to technologies**

Emerging Best Practices (1)

Initiating a Regulatory Sandbox	
☐	*Identify barriers to innovation in the jurisdiction and determine which type of sandbox-type mechanism, sandbox design elements, and other innovation vehicles will best address those specific barriers.*
☐	*Solicit buy-in from relevant leadership.*
☐	*Consider establishing an advisory or working group to foster stakeholder buy-in, bring in expertise in new areas, and provide ongoing support for the sandbox.*

Emerging Best Practices (2)

Designing a Regulatory Sandbox	
☐	*Identify clear and ambitious sandbox objectives aligned with state and regulatory goals and in consideration of stakeholder input.*
☐	*Consider learning, speed, and eventual scaling as primary objectives.*
☐	*Clearly define terminology such as "pilot," "demonstration," and "innovative" upfront and with stakeholder input.*
☐	*Develop clear guidelines on project eligibility, application processes, and selection criteria.*
☐	*Consider selection criteria that align with sandbox objectives, reward proposals that follow best practices for pilot design and implementation, are relatively simple in structure, and are responsive to customer needs and desires.*
☐	*Create multiple pathways to participation so that innovators and stakeholders can put ideas forward in addition to or in partnership with utilities.*
☐	*Establish clear reporting and evaluation requirements using metrics that align with desired outcomes.*
☐	*Identify go/no-go checkpoints and criteria for selected projects.*
☐	*Create data and information-sharing requirements as part of reporting by utilities and third party participants.*
☐	*Clearly identify scaling strategies and processes for projects that go through the sandbox mechanism.*

Emerging Best Practices (3)

Administering a Regulatory Sandbox	
☐	*Establish and clearly communicate a calendar of events or other sandbox timelines and key dates.*
☐	*Design templates or standard format documents for applications and for evaluating proposals to reduce administrative burdens.*
☐	*Dedicate sufficient staff resources to the sandbox, including cross-functional teams with pre-identified roles and processes for quickly reviewing applications (if relevant).*
☐	*Create channels for regular, candid, non-punitive conversations between regulators and utilities, other innovators, and stakeholders, including non-decisional Commission staff.*
☐	*Create processes for continuous learning and checkpoints to adjust the sandbox mechanism over time.*
☐	*Establish and maintain multiple communication channels for sharing information on the sandbox, such as an informational webpage, a library of sandbox project results, an innovation idea exchange portal, or a sandbox newsletter.*

ENERGY MARKETS & POLICY

Contacts

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For more information

Download publications: https://emp.lbl.gov/publications
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Acknowledgements

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INNOVATIVE ENERGY SOLUTIONS

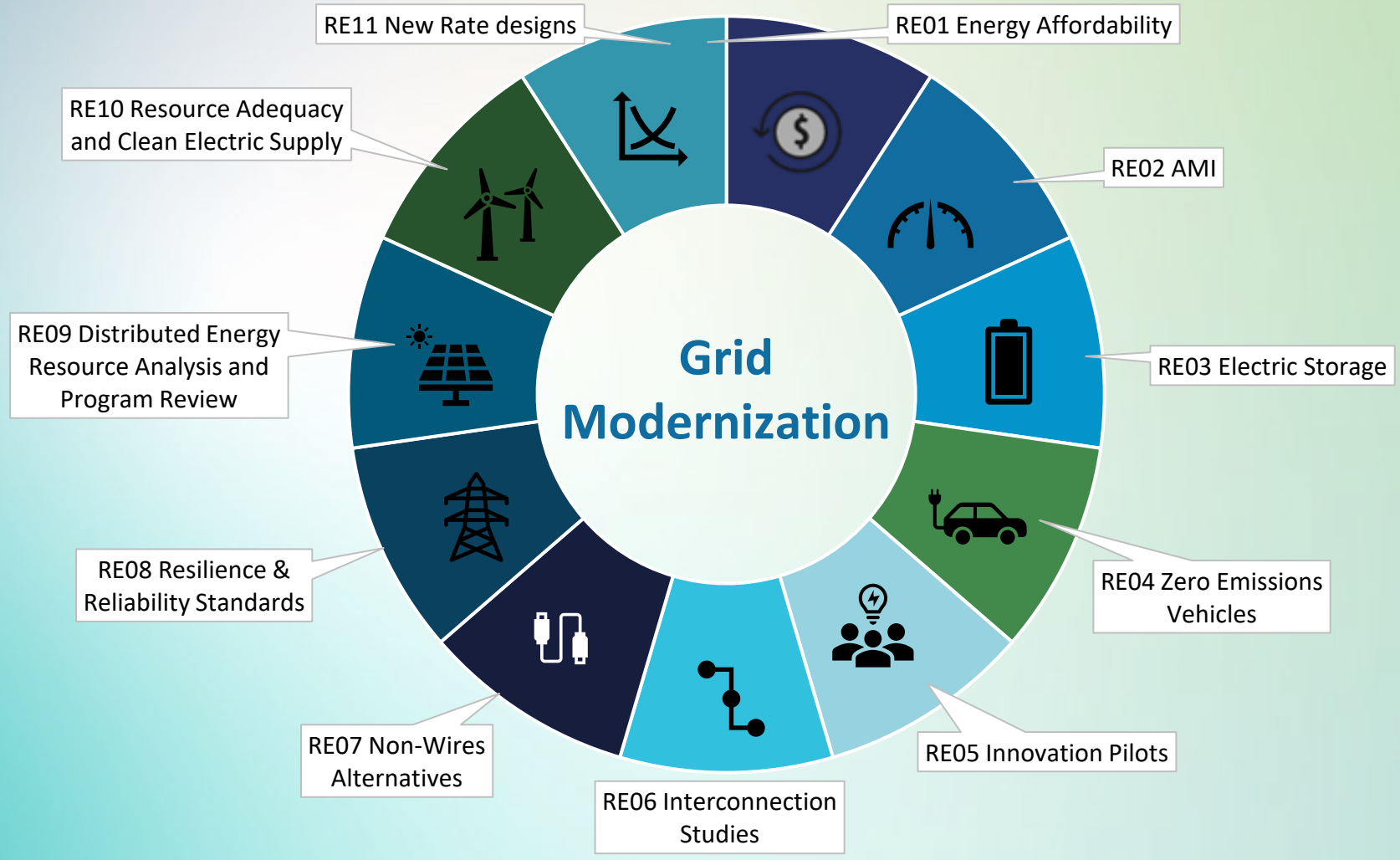
Connecticut Innovative Energy Solutions (IES) Program Overview

PURA's Equitable Modern Grid Framework

October 2, 2019, Docket No. 17-12-03 Interim Decision:

1. Support, or remove barriers to, the growth of CT's green economy;
2. Enable a cost-effective, economy-wide transition to a decarbonized future;
3. Enhance customer access to a resilient, reliable, and secure commodity;
4. Advance the ongoing energy affordability dialogue in the State; particularly for underserved communities.

Grid Modernization Dockets



What is the IES Program?

Purpose

- Support EMG Framework Objectives
- Deploy innovative technologies that offer high-value to ratepayers but face challenges to deployment under existing program structures or regulatory processes.
- Reduce risk to ratepayers

Design Principles

- Economic Viability & Equity
- Transparency
- Diversity & Market Gaps
- Scalability
- Continuous Learning

Structure

- Annual solicitation with a specific theme
- Up to $5M per project
- Application review first conducted by a council of state agencies, PURA, EDCs, and advocates
- Final funding approval held by PURA
- Multiple pathways to participation

Project Criteria

- Innovation Potential
- Project Achievability
- Project Benefits Society, customer, and Grid
- Decarbonization Potential
- Focus on Underserved Communities

Four-Phased Approach

Phase 1: Ideation & Screening

- Solicit ideas from innovators that could be suitable for the Innovative Pilots Framework program
- Screen out projects that are not suitable for the program and send to an alternate program, as appropriate

"Fail Fast" Off-ramp

"Fail Fast" Off-ramp

Phase 2: Prioritization & Selection

- Evaluate potential projects based on criteria such as value delivery, customer impact, potential to scale, alignment with EMG objectives, etc.
- Select portfolio of projects that can test various unique elements of design

Phase 3: Project Deployment

- Establish scope, scale, and duration of projects
- Establish tracking and performance metrics to be used through implementation

"Fail Fast" Off-ramp

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Phase 4: Assessment & Scale

- Review performance from projects
- Identify projects to potentially scale and retire projects that have served their purpose
- Identify opportunities for improvement and/or goals for next program cycle

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Innovation Advisory Council

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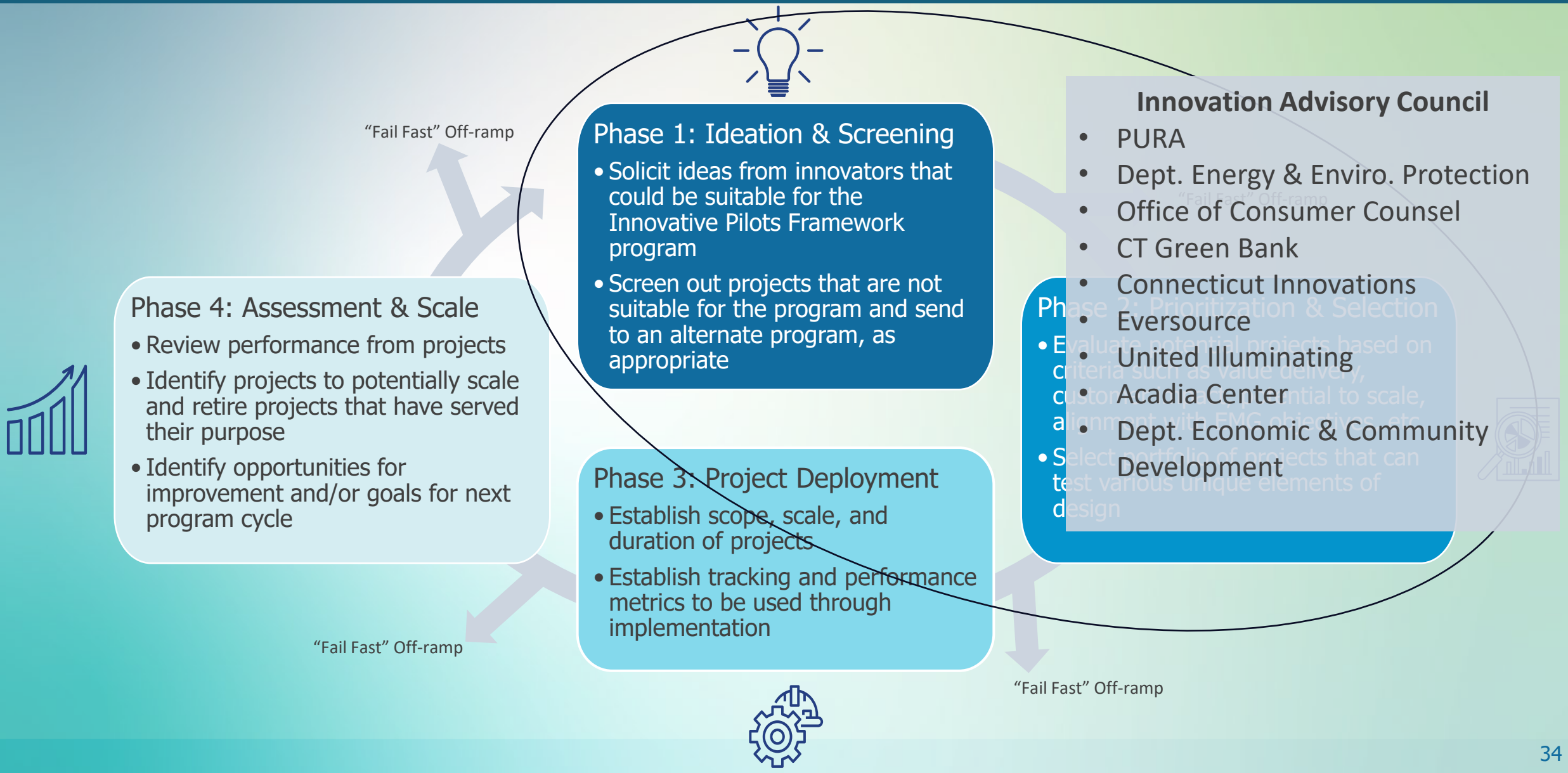

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Three Pathways for Innovator Participation

Pathway 1: Innovator-Led

- Third-party product or solution that does not directly affect utility-owned grid infrastructure

Pathway 2: Utility-Led

- Utility projects focused on innovative customer programs and/or tariff structures

Pathway 3: Utility-Innovator Partnerships

- Jointly proposed collaborative partnerships between the innovator and the EDC

Initial Project Eligibility Criteria

Phase 1 Project Eligibility Criteria

- Avoids EDC competitive advantage
- Avoids unreasonable ratepayer impacts
- Advances decarbonization goals
- Innovation potential
- Completeness
- Addresses gaps in current offerings
- Impacts to underserved communities

Phase 2 Application Requirements

- Cost/Benefit Estimates
  - Participants served
  - Project costs
  - Customer, community, & energy benefits
  - DEI metrics
- Implementation tracking plan
  - Execution stages and milestones
  - Metric development and evaluation
  - Data collection and reporting

Initial Project Eligibility Criteria

Cycle 1 – 2023 Demand-Side Flexibility

- Seven projects selected
- Technologies include virtual power plants, V2G school bus, flexibility marketplace
- Pilot phase concludes September 2025 – Phase 4 Evaluation for scale after that.

Cycle 2 – 2024 Empowering Electrification

- Nine projects selected
- Technologies include smart electrical panels, MHD refuse truck electrification, AI cameras for grid monitoring, V2G EV charging
- Pilot phase launched January 2025, will conclude September 2026

Cycle 3 – 2025 Smart Energy Communities

- Recommendations submitted to PURA decisional staff on July 31, 2025
- Decision expected December 2025 for funding

INNOVATIVE ENERGY SOLUTIONS

Contact Us

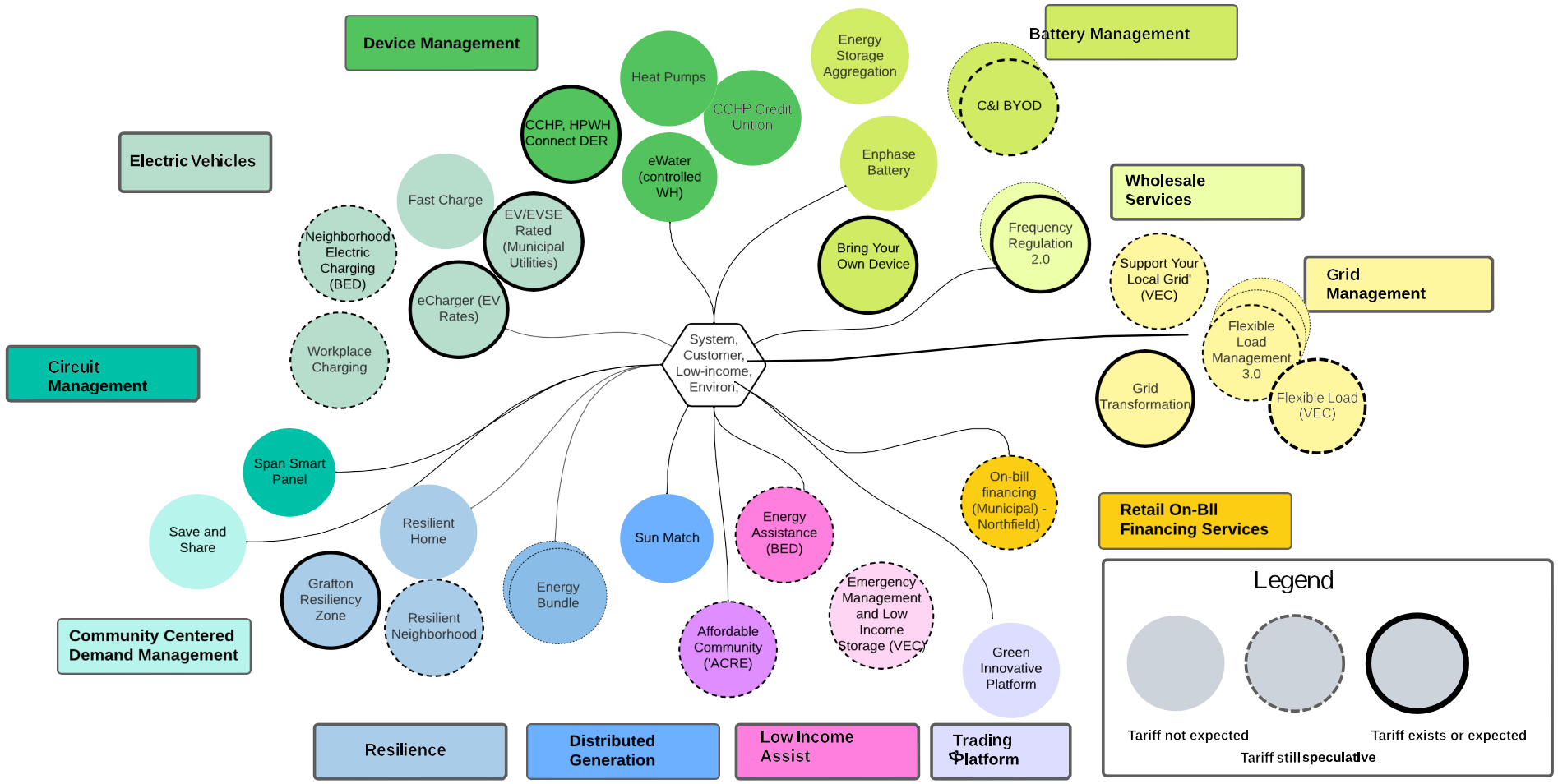
Email: info@ct-ies.com

Website: www.CT-IES.com

Regulatory Sandboxes: Vermont Experience

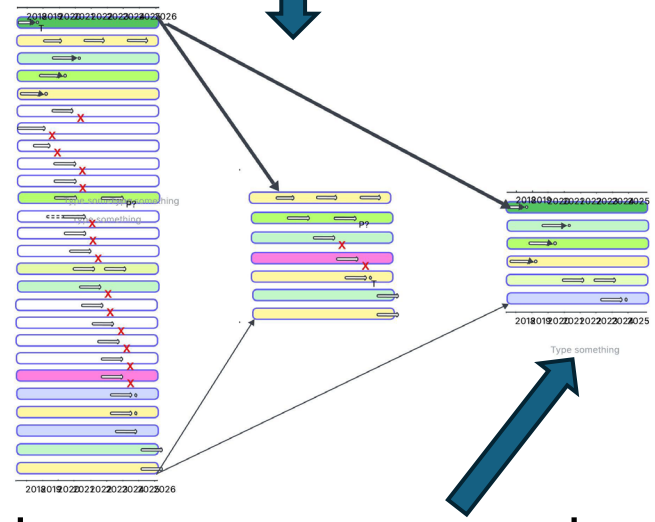
Riley Allen, Commissioner, Vermont PUC

Innovative Pilots over from 6/2017 through 8/2025

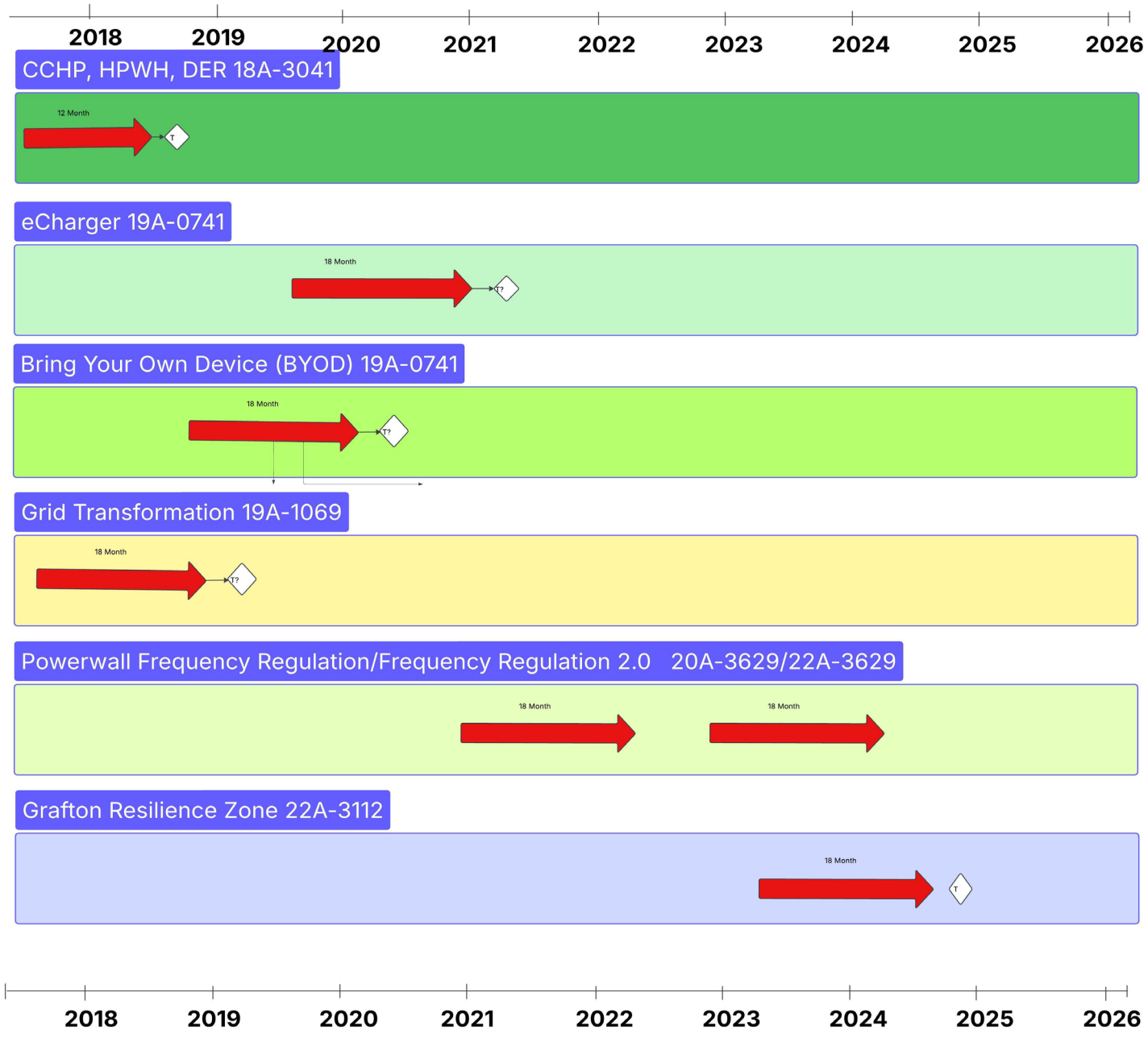


27 Potential Tariffed Services Trialed

At least 7 are still in development, review or have outside dependencies



6 have or are expected to be tariffed



Common Objectives and Lessons from Pilots

Common Service Objectives

- Load management
- Load building
- Resilience
- Environment
- Customer Empowerment
- Low-income assist
- Wholesale services

Main Areas of Understanding Gained

- ❖ Customer participation
- ❖ Testing enabling platform/technologies
- ❖ Potential for system/grid benefit (value proposition)

Utility-Stated Criteria for Innovative Pilot Commitment

- Is it something that a customer would want to engage in?
- Does it provide value to all customers?
- Does it provide the utility with a new flexible resource to manage a more distributed, intermittent power system?
- Does the program directly support disadvantaged customers, which could include income based or other factors identified in various vulnerability indices?

THANK YOU

Additional Resources and Reference Materials

GMP Multi-year Rate Plan Appendix 2 -- https://gmpsnapshot.greenmountainpower.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Final-2023-Regulation-Plan-as-amended-March-30-2023.pdf

ePUC – Innovative Pilot Reports -- https://epuc.vermont.gov/

Statutory Authority 30 VSA 218d (all energy utilities) and 218d(o) relevant to municipal and coop utilities -- https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/30/005/00218d

Bonus Slide for Easy Reference
Vermont List of Power-Sector Innovative Pilots as of 8/11/25

All Innovative Pilots available on ePUC*

Case Number	Name	From	Status	Filing Date
25A-1673	Income qualified battery storage	VEC	Open	8/8/2025
25A-1405	Innovative pilot for its municipal company members EV/EVSE rates	VPPSA	Open	7/15/2025
25A-1387	Commercial Demand Response Pilot Rate	BED	Open	7/14/2025
25A-0499	On-bill financing innovative pilot	NED	Open	3/17/2025
24A-3414	Support Your Local Grid Innovative pilot 01/20/2025 - 07/20/2026	VEC	Open	11/14/2024
24A-3053	Neighborhood Electric Vehicle Charger rate innovative pilot	BED	Open	10/1/2024
23A-4188	Flexible Load Management 3.0 Pilot	GMP	Open	12/7/2023
23A-1487	Resilient Neighborhood Innovative Pilot	GMP	Closed	5/8/2023
23A-0109	Affordable Community Renewable Energy (ACRE) Pilot Notice	GMP	Open	1/12/2023
22A-4844	Flexible Load innovative pilot	VEC	Closed	11/14/2022
22A-3629	Frequency Regulation 2.0 Innovative Pilot	GMP	Closed	8/26/2022
22A-3112	Grafton Resiliency Zone Innovative pilot	GMP	Closed	8/2/2022
22A-2563	Bring Your Own Device 2.0 Innovative Pilot	GMP	Closed	7/1/2022
22A-2177	Energy Assistance Pilot Rate	BED	Closed	6/9/2022
22A-0834	Sun Match Innovative Pilot Notice	GMP	Closed	3/16/2022
22A-0150	Enphase Battery Innovative Pilot	GMP	Closed	1/14/2022
21A-1489	Span Smart Panel Innovative Pilot	GMP	Closed	4/21/2021
21A-1478	Charge Fast Innovative Pilot 12 month report	GMP	Closed	4/20/2021
21A-1477	Energy Bundle innovative pilot final report	GMP	Closed	4/20/2021
21A-1111	Flexible Load Management 2.0 innovative pilot	GMP	Closed	3/17/2021
21A-0311	workplace charging innovative pilot	GMP	Closed	1/25/2021
20A-3629	Powerwall Frequency Regulation Innovative Pilot	GMP	Closed	11/30/2020
20A-1347	Save and Share Innovative Pilot	GMP	Closed	5/27/2020
20A-0619	Charge Fast Innovative Pilot	GMP	Closed	3/6/2020
20A-0048	See #18A-4147 for Flexible Load Management Innovative Pilot Case Information	GMP	Closed	1/7/2020
19A-4600	Vermont Green Innovative Pilot	GMP	Closed	11/18/2019
19A-3344	Bring-Your-Own-Device ("C&I BYOD") innovative pilot	GMP	Closed	8/26/2019
19A-3343	Energy Storage Aggregation innovative pilot	GMP	Closed	8/23/2019
19A-3193	Energy Bundle innovative pilot	GMP	Closed	8/6/2019
19A-2946	**See #18A-4147 re: Flexible Load Management Innovative Pilot Six Month Report Update and Notice of termination of Cold Climate Heat Pump	GMP	Closed	7/8/2019
19A-1327	Credit Union innovative pilot	GMP	Closed	5/6/2019
19A-1254	eWater innovative pilot	GMP	Closed	4/30/2019
19A-1242	Resilient Home innovative pilot	GMP	Closed	4/30/2019
19A-1069	Grid Transformation Innovative Pilot Report	GMP	Closed	4/15/2019
19A-1020	Bring-Your-Own-Device Innovative Pilot	GMP	Closed	4/10/2019
19A-0741	eCharger Pilot Final Report	GMP	Closed	3/15/2019
19A-0561	**See #19A-1020 re: amendment to existing Bring Your Own Device Innovative Pilot (3/12-09/10/19)	GMP	Closed	2/25/2019
18A-4147	Flexible Load Management Innovative Pilot	GMP	Closed	12/7/2018
18A-3622	**See #19A-1020 BYOD Pilot 6 Month Report	GMP	Closed	10/19/2018
18A-3041	Cold climate heat pumps, heat pump water heaters, and ConnectDER innovative pilots	GMP	Closed	8/31/2018

*Note: 8/11/25. Go to epuc.vermont.gov/ and search under "All Cases". Click the "innovative pilots" box under "issue type"

Q&A


NARUC CPI Innovation Webinar
Moderator: Hon. Erik Helland, Iowa Utilities Commission
Julia Dumaine, Connecticut Public Utilities Regulatory Agency
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- **NCEP Webinar Series: State Agency Roles in Load Growth**, Fall dates TBA soon

Upcoming In-Person Events:

- **Cybersecurity Training for State Regulatory Commissions**, Nashville, TN, October 15 – 17, 2025
- **NARUC Annual Meeting and Education Conference**, Seattle, WA, November 9 – 12, 2025

See the full list of events and access registration links at: www.naruc.org/events/event-list/