



THE PEOPLE'S VISION 2020
**for a Democratic, Just
and Green TVA**



Appalachian
Voices



This report was prepared by participants of the Tennessee Valley Energy Democracy Movement, including Appalachian Voices, Science for the People and Statewide Organizing for Community eMpowerment.

THE PEOPLE'S VISION

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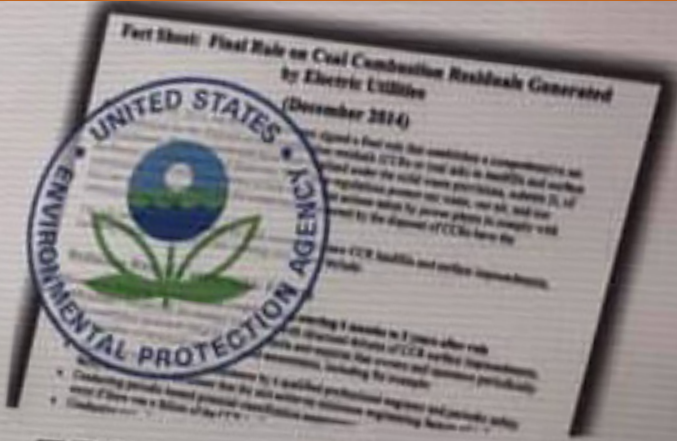
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Kingston disaster on Dec. 22 releases 1.1 billion gallons of coal ash into the Clinch and Emory rivers

Clean Air Act Settlement requires TVA to reduce emissions and invest \$350 million in environmental mitigation projects in communities near TVA facilities



EPA passes the Coal Combustion Residuals (CCR) rule regulating coal ash disposal

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On the Crisis of Public Power in the Tennessee Valley

Months before the COVID-19 pandemic hit U.S. shores, organizations and community groups in the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) footprint came together to address what we view as a crisis of our public energy system.

Lack of democratic, public control over major energy decisions has resulted in displacement of communities, degraded public and environmental health, unaffordable electric bills, and injustice towards energy workers in the Tennessee Valley. In

Clearly, the public power model in the Tennessee Valley is broken; more likely, it was never fully realized.

spite of the global climate crisis, our public power fails to provide adequate access to clean energy alternatives even as residents call for these critical resources. Time and again, TVA's public input mechanisms have disempowered residents who have taken the time and energy to engage. Clearly, the public power model in the Tennessee Valley is broken; more likely, it was never fully realized.

As communities struggle with not being heard, political and corporate interests have pushed for privatizing the Tennessee Valley Authority. This is where the crisis lies; without public ownership over our power, communities in the Valley risk losing thousands of contracted union jobs, billions of dollars in public infrastructure, and access to lower-cost electricity that utilities can offer when not beholden to a profit-making mission. Privatizing energy ownership in the Valley would fundamentally eliminate any hope for communities to enact democratic control over their energy. To establish a true energy democracy, our public power system needs to be transformed by the people.

In 2020, the coronavirus pandemic has brought an even greater burden on our public and economic health, including an increased risk of losing basic access to electricity for sick and out-of-work residents. Now more than ever, solving the crisis of

public power is crucial for the recovery and resilience of communities in the Tennessee Valley. The *Tennessee Valley Energy Democracy Movement* has already begun to address this question by starting at the grassroots, with a workshop series that gathered our communities' vision for a better energy future.

This vision calls for an energy system that:

- Protects workers and provides high quality jobs;
- Prioritizes health over wealth, for communities and the environment;
- Generates electricity with clean, safe, renewable energy;

- Makes bills affordable and ensures everyone has power;
- Provides equitable access to energy efficiency and solar;
- Generates energy locally; and
- Is democratically controlled by the public.

More details on this vision and the methods we used to gather input are included in the paper below. In the coming months, Tennessee Valley Energy Democracy Movement will release a legislative platform aimed at achieving this energy future.

The People's Vision for a Democratic, Just and Green TVA

In 2019, the Tennessee Valley Energy Democracy Tour collected input from 13 communities with the goal of creating a "people's vision" for the energy future of the region served by the Tennessee Valley Authority, a federally owned power producer serving Tennessee and parts of six surrounding states.

The feedback collected during this workshop series is both exciting and robust. Community members shared ideas that ranged from high-level goals to specific policy recommendations. In this section, those ideas have been summarized and presented for sharing with larger audiences.

A note on this summary:

The Energy Democracy Tour was designed to gather meaningful input from voices that are often ignored or overlooked when decisions are being made about our energy. The results of this project have also been shaped by the individuals and groups who facilitated and summarized the data. Ultimately, the vision below is structured to be true to the voices we heard during the tour and will ideally reflect the larger needs, values and concerns of communities throughout the region.

In the spirit of participatory democracy, this "people's vision" is offered as a launching pad for a movement that is still being built by the people of the Tennessee Valley. Feedback, input and improved versions of this vision are welcome and encouraged.



BACKGROUND

Who Participated in the Visioning Process?

The Tennessee Valley Energy Democracy Tour achieved varied success in both attendance and participant diversity at tour stops. Organizers of this tour found smaller tour stops (which tended to be more rural) to be just as productive and valuable to the overall visioning discussions.

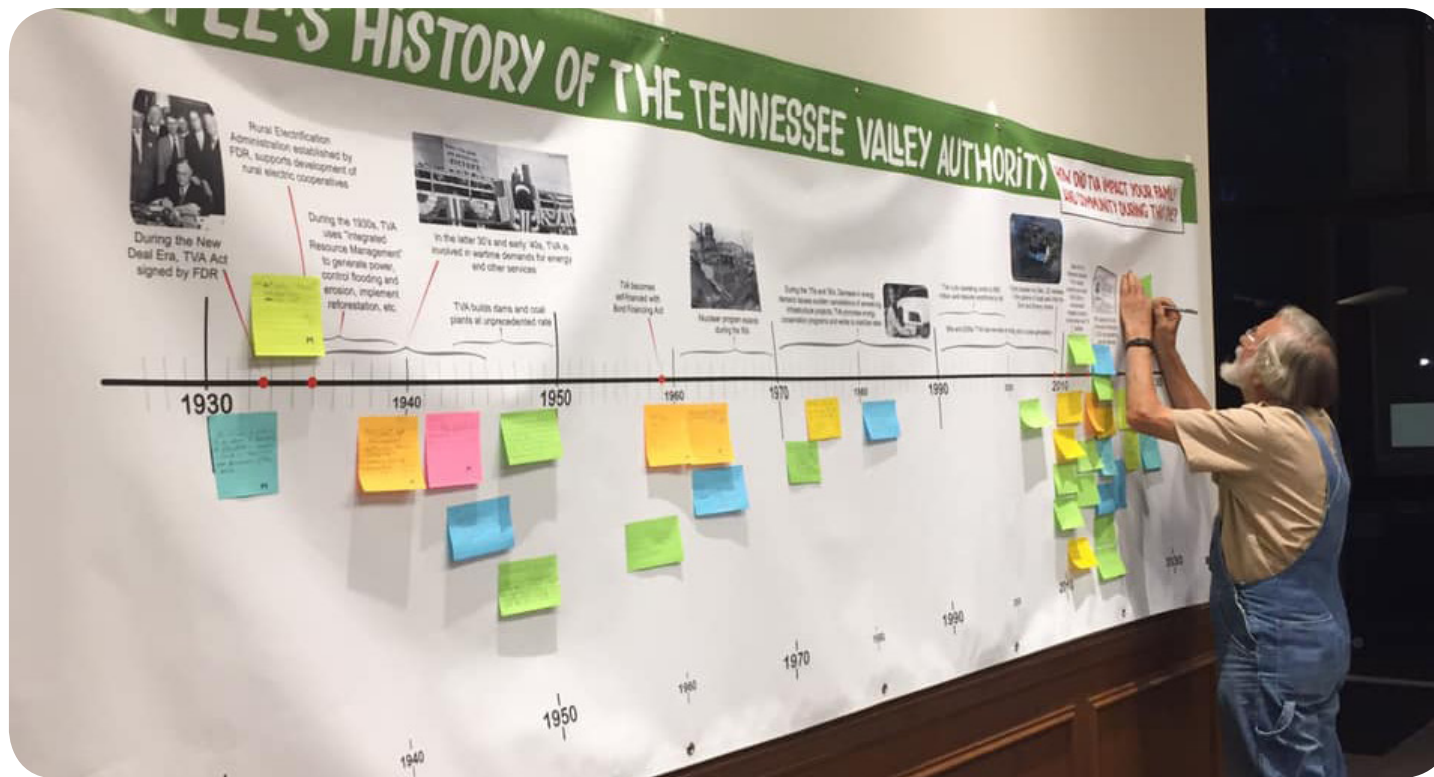
Attendance estimates are as follows:

Memphis, TN - 45
Knoxville, TN - 40
Nashville, TN - 75

Lafollette, TN - 12
Huntsville, AL - 15
Chattanooga, TN - 35
Rogersville, TN - 12
Bowling Green, KY - 15
Crossville, TN - 20
Clarksville, TN - 25
Tazewell, TN - 5
Claxton, TN - 45
Clairfield, TN - 12

More background on the content and structure of the Energy Democracy Tour can be found in the following sections.





A People's History of the Tennessee Valley Authority

During the Energy Democracy Tour, a "People's History of TVA" was collected as participants contributed to a timeline of TVA's impacts on the region. These contributions ranged from energy bills that topped \$700 in one month, to families losing their land via eminent domain, to stories of workers that cleaned up the infamous Kingston coal ash spill. This insightful history collection has been stored on a digital timeline that can be found [here](#).

The Results:

Community Vision for Our Energy Future

During the Energy Democracy Tour, organizers asked community members what they wanted for their energy future, and participants responded with an impressive set of ideas. The priorities raised focused on much more than the production of our energy. These priorities included who can access and afford energy, the workers and jobs that depend on it, the way that energy impacts people and the environment, and the way our energy is governed. Community members demonstrated powerful values of social, economic and environmental

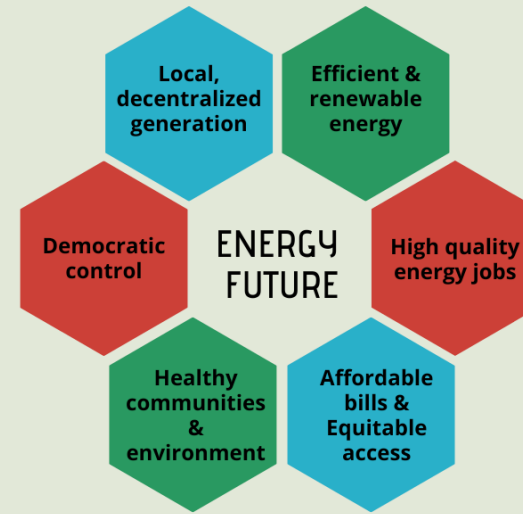
justice during these conversations. Ultimately, organizers consolidated these results into six main categories. The vision this lays out is in incredible contrast to the energy system we have today.

1. Efficient and Renewable Energy
2. Local, Decentralized Generation
3. High Quality Energy Jobs
4. Democratic Control
5. Affordable Bills & Equitable Access
6. Healthy Communities & Environment

While very few active TVA workers attended these workshops, most of the conversations demonstrated a clear value and concern for jobs and how they would be impacted by a major energy transition. A community member in Huntsville, Alabama, concisely expressed this concern by saying our energy future should, “prioritize those whose jobs and lives depend on fossil fuels.”

Another important concept that arose during the energy future conversations was the idea that “energy is a human right.” This principle was initially raised by a participant in Nashville and again in various phrasing at subsequent tour stops. The authors of this report highly encourage community groups and organizations to explore the meaning of “energy as a human right” and consider how it could influence the energy future of the TVA region.

ED TOUR RESULTS



A Democratic Process

“Not just input, but a real role in decision making.” This was a sentiment expressed frequently by participants who discussed how communities should be involved in the decision-making process at TVA. The feedback indicated that TVA’s current decision-making process excludes and disempowers community members.

- Accountability measures
- Transparency and accessibility for ratepayers
- Education programs
- Integration in the community
- Improved public input processes
- Voting and representation on issues and board seats

According to participants in this workshop series, an improved decision-making process at TVA would include:

Notably, participants of these conversations clearly saw the importance of public education on energy issues prior to making decisions. This vision



for an informed, democratic decision-making process is significant because uninformed participation is often viewed by institutions as a significant threat to the viability of public decision making.

In these conversations, workshop participants also raised the need for improvements to the governance and decision-making processes of TVA's distributor utilities, also called "local power companies," which are public utilities owned by cities or member-owners.

The Path to Change

Participants of the Energy Democracy Tour shared ideas for what changes need to be made with TVA in order to reach the energy future they envision. This discussion saw some overlap from previous conversations as well as many unique and important points. For instance, several of the workshops included conversations about TVA's reliance on funding from bond sales, and many participants raised the idea of restoring the federal appropriations that TVA used to receive for funding power operations, environmental activities and economic development. Participants also identified barriers imposed by TVA's debt and discussed different means of addressing the problem.

The authors of this report organized the results of this vigorous discussion into four areas of change and several pathways for achieving those changes.

Areas of Change:

- Business model
- Technology & infrastructure
- Governance
- Relationships

Pathways to Change:

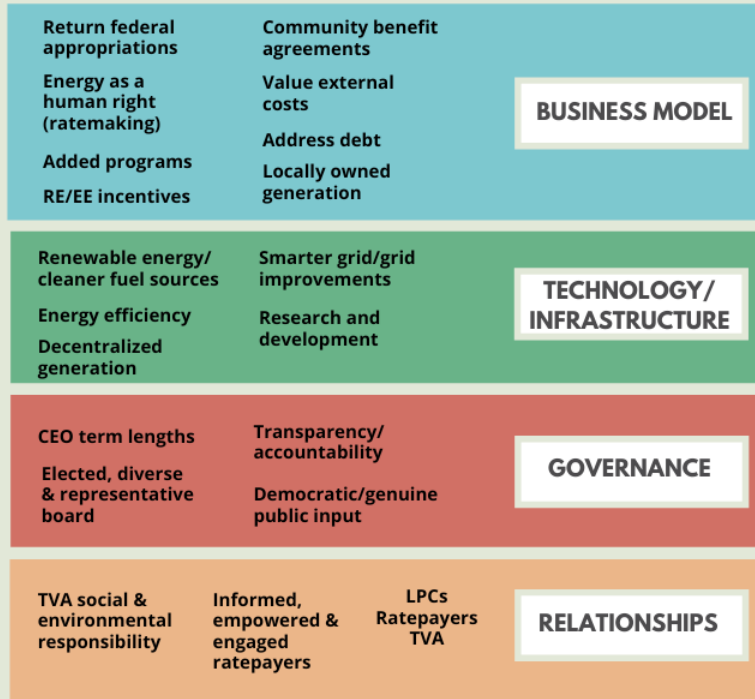
- Federal and state policy
- Ratepayer pressure on TVA
- LPC/TVPPA pressure on TVA
- TVA Act
- TVA board charter, bylaws & internal policies
- Ratepayer representation on boards and committees

Community members repeatedly stated that they wanted to see TVA prioritize more than just the financial bottom line by focusing on "people and the environment, not profit," as deliberately phrased by one workshop participant.

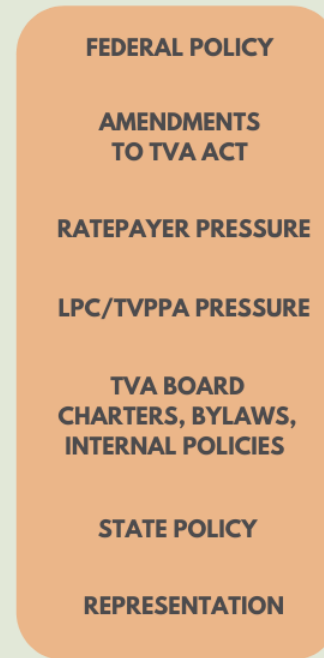


ED TOUR RESULTS

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?



PATHWAYS TO CHANGE:



Moving Forward:

Though just a summary is provided with this report, the detailed community feedback that was gathered during the tour is being used by the Tennessee Valley Energy Democracy Movement to draft a legislative platform for reforming public power in Tennessee Valley. We invite organizations and activists to join us in that process!

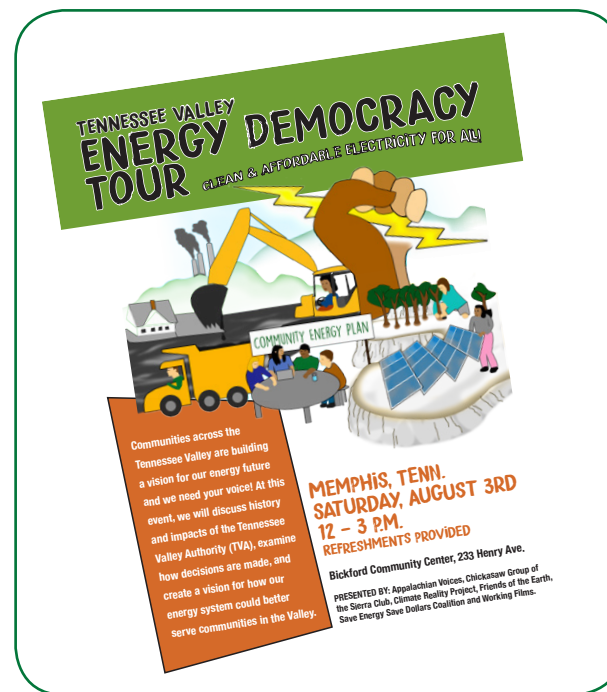
Tennessee Valley Energy Democracy Tour: Gathering Community Input

The Tennessee Valley Energy Democracy Tour was a workshop series held in 13 communities in the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) service area in 2019. Developed by a small group of organizations and activists including Appalachian Voices, Science for the People and Statewide Organizing for Community eMpowerment, this project aimed to generate a grassroots vision for the energy future of the region.

The tour was inspired by decades of harmful decision making by TVA, which, despite its role as a public energy provider, often fails to take public input into account when making decisions that impact communities. Through the use of popular education modules, local history collection and listening sessions, the Energy Democracy Tour collected information on participants' perceived problems with TVA and ideas for how the utility could better meet the needs of local communities. Following those conversations, advocates are using the feedback from the tour to develop a policy platform that would achieve the "energy future" communities say they want.

Outreach process:

Organizers of this tour sought to reach the communities that were most impacted by TVA's policy failures, though time constraints and limited resources also played an inevitable role in the planning and implementation of events. The primary



method for identifying tour locations and local “co-hosts” involved distributing a “Call for Partners” document to various networks dealing with energy concerns in the region. Most of the early interest in the tour came from an existing “TVA working group,” which is a coalition of nonprofits explicitly focused on TVA issues.

As tour organizers identified event locations, they worked with co-hosts to solicit additional support from local groups in each area to generate a more diverse turnout to the workshops.

A list of workshop locations and local co-hosts are as follows:

1. Memphis, TN - Memphis Light, Gas and Water, Climate Reality Project, Friends of the Earth, Sierra Club
2. Nashville, TN - Sunrise Nashville, Tennessee Interfaith Power & Light, Indivisible, Southern Alliance for Clean Energy
3. Knoxville, TN - SOCM, The Alliance House, Southern Alliance for Clean Energy, Science for the People
4. LaFollette, TN - LaFollette Utilities Board, Campbell Heartland Network, Postmark LaFollette
5. Rogersville, TN - CARE Net Group
6. Huntsville, AL - Energy Alabama
7. Chattanooga, TN - Tennessee Interfaith Power & Light, Sierra Club,
8. Bowling Green, KY - Kentuckians For The Commonwealth
9. Crossville, TN - SOCM, Indivisible
10. Clarksville, TN - TN Interfaith Power & Light, Sierra Club, Indivisible

11. Tazewell, TN - PVEC Member Voices
12. Claxton, TN - SOCM, Bull Run Community Group, Sierra Club
13. Clairfield, TN - Woodland Community Land Trust, Clearfork Community Institute, Sierra Club, SOCM

Workshop Format:

The Energy Democracy Tour workshops included three main components:

- Popular education modules and activities;
- Listening sessions (group discussions); and
- A component that captured TVA’s history and impacts on local communities.

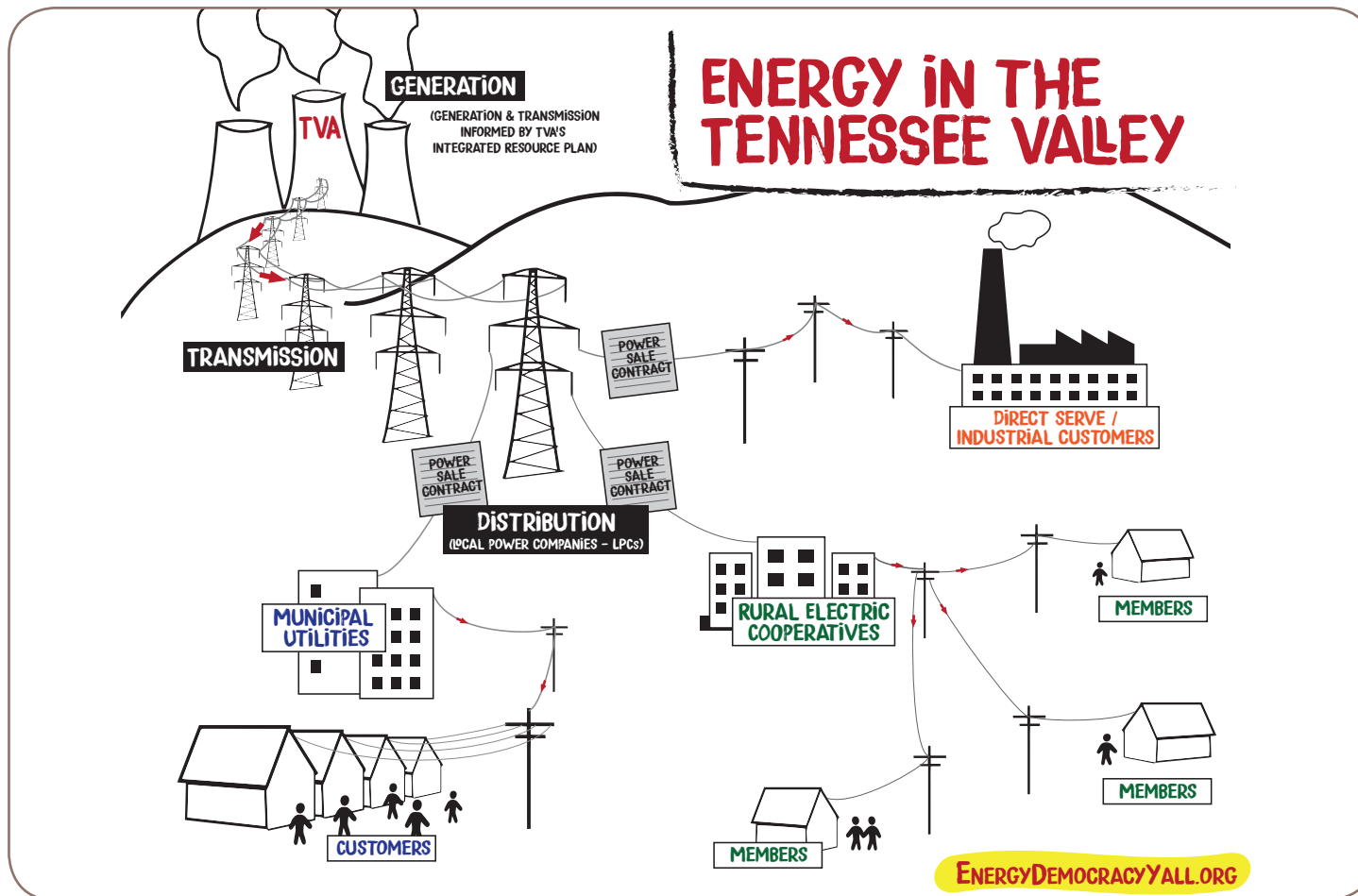
The specific needs of co-hosts and community groups varied with each location, so workshop design was sometimes adjusted in order to meet those local needs. At every event, facilitators aimed to equip participants with a deeper understanding of the TVA energy system and its impacts, tools for organizing within that system, and space for articulating a community vision for a better energy future.

Education modules:

The production, distribution and regulation of energy in the TVA system is both wildly complex and stubbornly vague. In spite of this, organizers of the tour understood that community members hold a wealth of generational knowledge and experience regarding the TVA system. “Popular education” activities and discussions, designed to draw out the expertise and experience of community members, were used to build a collective understanding of how the TVA energy system works. This foundation was important for ensuring productive listening and visioning sessions later in the events.

The three main focus areas of the education modules included an overview of the TVA energy system, TVA influence and decision making, and TVA history and impacts. Educational materials and activities were incorporated to supplement discussion, including a map of the energy system, an "influence map" activity, film clips from The Electric

Valley (a documentary on TVA), and a large timeline of TVA history dubbed the "People's History of TVA" that participants made additions to at each workshop.



Visioning Sessions:

Workshop participants, in breakout groups or as a whole (depending on attendance), were asked three common discussion questions in order to build a vision for a better energy future in the Tennessee Valley. These questions were:

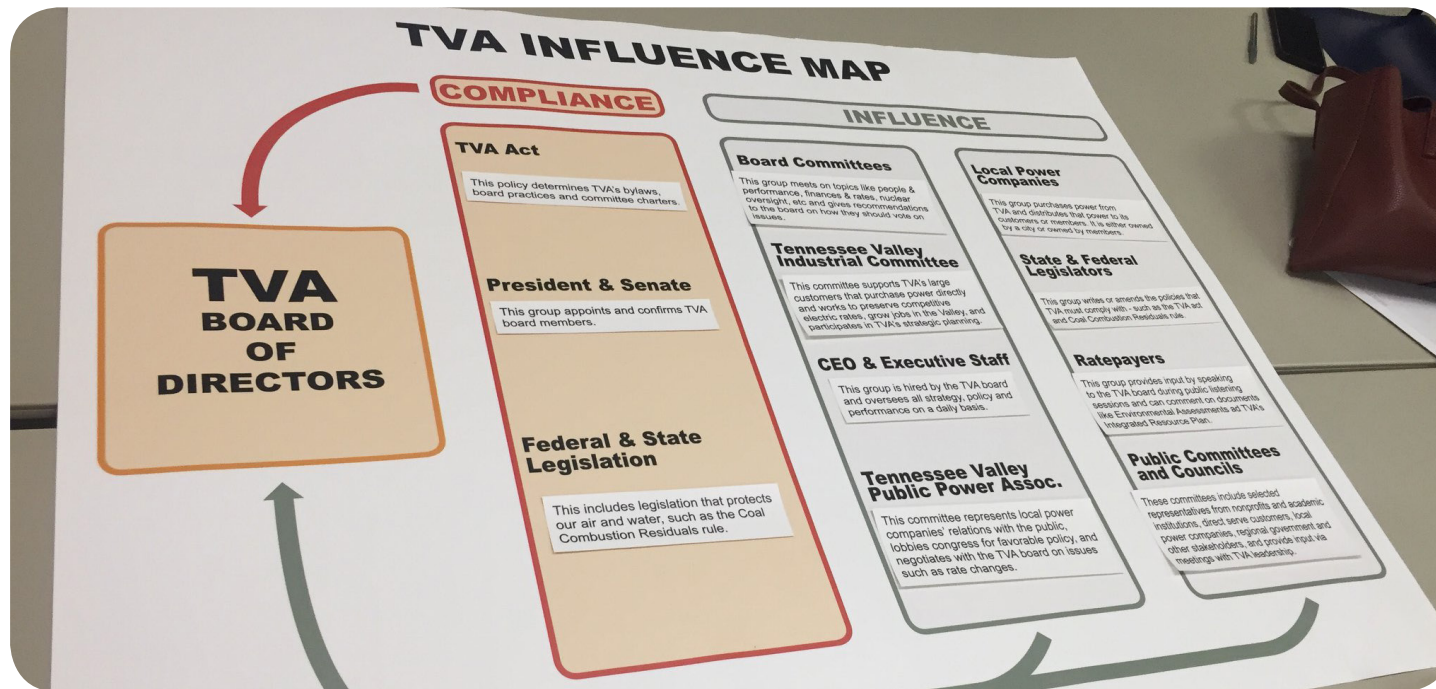
1. "What do you want for your energy future?"
2. "What needs to change in order to reach that energy future?"
3. "How should TVA involve communities in the decision making process?"

For each prompt, participants were asked to "dream big" and imagine the best possible outcomes. Facilitators rephrased the prompts when necessary in

order to elicit as much participation and feedback as possible.

Discussion notes were collected on flip charts and later digitized, along with additions made to the "People's History of TVA" timeline. Following each event, digital notes were given to co-hosts and community members who shared emails on sign-in sheets. Participants were informed that this feedback would later be translated into policy recommendations, which will be released in future sections of this report.

If readers of this report would like to replicate or expand on the workshop model described above, they can contact Tennessee Valley Energy Democracy Movement for outlines and materials.





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