



Getting Electric Vehicle Ready in Indian Country

As electric vehicles (EVs) become more common, Tribes can guide how charging infrastructure is planned, approved, and built on Tribal lands. Tribes can prepare for future infrastructure projects by updating codes, zoning, parking rules, and permitting process, as well as improving electrical infrastructure and broadband access.

Codes, Ordinances, Policies, and Permitting

Regulatory requirements for installing EV charging equipment vary based on location and land ownership status. Understanding policies and updating codes, ordinances, and permitting processes that support EV charging projects can facilitate Tribes becoming EV ready. Exercising Tribal sovereignty in these processes can also promote Tribal land use and regulatory sovereignty.

Building Codes

Building codes set standards for designing, constructing, and renovating buildings. Tribes can establish building codes to codify their own priorities and standards as well as exercise sovereignty over their lands. EV charging infrastructure

building codes can be a useful tool to support EV charging projects by lowering future costs and speeding up installation.

For example, a Tribe could support EV readiness by establishing a building code that requires retrofits of Tribally owned buildings to include electrical system upgrades to facilitate future EV charging stations.

Parking Ordinances

Tribal parking ordinances can be part of a Tribe's land sovereignty strategy, as parking ordinances control where, when, and how vehicles park. Updating parking ordinances to be EV friendly makes it easier to install charging infrastructure where people already park. For example, parking ordinances can allow for EV charging station spots to count toward the minimum required number of parking spots at a building.



The Alliance for Tribal Clean Energy and the National Laboratory of the Rockies partnered to develop resources for Tribes interested in pursuing public EV charging infrastructure.

Zoning Ordinances

Zoning ordinances determine how land can be used, including what can be built in certain areas. Zoning ordinances can prohibit or encourage EV charging infrastructure, and Tribes can update ordinances to be EV friendly. For example, zoning laws could allow EV charging stations at all existing and new buildings on trust lands.

Managing the different zoning ordinances across checkerboarded reservations can be challenging. One method to better enable EV charging infrastructure development may be to establish memorandums of understanding with neighboring jurisdictions to establish clear land use and zoning authorities (Hill and Tovey 2023). This can streamline planning processes.

Visit the Building Codes, Parking Ordinances, and Zoning Ordinances for Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure page (afdc.energy.gov/fuels/electricity-codes-and-ordinances) to find example codes and ordinances that can increase EV readiness.

Entities subject to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) or Architectural Barriers Act must ensure EV charging stations are accessible to and usable by people with disabilities. Tribes should be aware of how this impacts the design of EV charging projects, as well as building code and parking and zoning ordinances. Visit the ADA Compliance for Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure page (afdc.energy.gov/fuels/electricity-ada-compliance) to learn more about ADA compliance for EV charging infrastructure.

Permitting

Projects on Tribal lands should be governed by Tribal permitting processes. Tribes should review their current permitting processes to see if they create barriers to EV charging projects. If they do, Tribes can create clear, specific processes for EV charging that speed up installation and retain Tribal control. This can include streamlining the permitting process for EV charging stations as well as clarifying jurisdictions (especially in checkerboarded areas) and responsible permitting parties.

Visit the Permitting Processes for Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure page (afdc.energy.gov/fuels/electricity-permitting-processes) for guidance, best practices, and additional resources.



Electrical Infrastructure

Grid challenges and constraints are one of the most significant barriers to EV charging infrastructure development. Before planning a project, understand the hosting capacity of the grid (i.e., the maximum amount of electricity the electrical grid can handle at a time). This requires coordination with local utilities and can determine whether grid infrastructure upgrades are needed to support future EV charging projects.

Consider:

- EV charging requires early planning. Understand whether the local electrical grid can support the Tribe's current and future EV charging needs.
- Engage with local utilities early to learn about available grid capacity in the area, how the utility can support future EV charging projects, and any limits that may exist. Utilities may also have programs and incentives that can support future projects. For more information on how Tribes can work with their electric utility, see **Section 3.6** of *Strategic Pathways for Indigenous Resilient and Innovative Transportation*: docs.nlr.gov/docs/fy26osti/99494.pdf.
- If grid hosting capacity is limited, upgrades to electrical infrastructure may be needed and can take time to complete. Coordinating grid upgrades with other planned electrical projects may make future EV charging infrastructure development easier and more affordable.



Broadband

When preparing to become EV ready, it is important to consider broadband (high-speed internet) access. Networked EV chargers depend on broadband to work safely, reliably, and efficiently. In rural and remote areas of Indian Country, broadband quality can determine whether chargers remain online. For Tribal Nations, broadband also supports Tribal sovereignty. When broadband is reliable and governed by Tribal policies, charging stations can meet performance standards, participate in energy programs, and ensure that Tribal data remain under Tribal control.

Tribes can verify broadband connectivity through their own testing. Federal Communications Commission broadband maps (broadbandmap.fcc.gov/home) often overstate service in Tribal communities. You can find other resources to assess and verify connectivity in *Strategic Pathways for Indigenous Resilient and Innovative Transportation*.

Cover image: The Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe proactively plans for future EV adoption by making sure all Tribally owned buildings are EV ready. Photo by Robert Knapp, Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe. Page 2: Photo by Liam Huber, Tule River Indian Tribe. Page 3: Photo by Blue Lake Rancheria.

Additional Resources

- Planning and Zoning for Electric Vehicle Charger Deployment from the Interstate Renewable Energy Council, Sustainable Energy Action Committee, and RMI: (sustainableenergyaction.org/resources/planning-and-zoning-guidance-for-electric-vehicle-charger-deployment/).
- Summary of Best Practices in Electric Vehicle Ordinances from the Great Plains Institute: (www.betterenergy.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/GPI_EV_Ordinance_Summary_web.pdf).
- Best Practice Guide for EVSE Regulations from the Fuels Institute: (dor.mo.gov/motor-vehicle/documents/ABestPracticeGuideForEVSERegulations.pdf).
- SWEEP Guide to EV Infrastructure Building Codes from the Southwest Energy Efficiency Project: (www.swenergy.org/ev-infrastructure-building-codes/).
- Local Jurisdiction Electric Vehicle Ready Checklist from the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments: ([content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MDMEA/2023/07/31/file_attachments/2569646/Local_Jurisdiction_EV_Ready_Checklist_FINAL_w_cover %281%29.pdf](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MDMEA/2023/07/31/file_attachments/2569646/Local_Jurisdiction_EV_Ready_Checklist_FINAL_w_cover%281%29.pdf)).
- Electric Vehicle Readiness guidance from the Alternative Fuels Data Center: (afdc.energy.gov/fuels/electricity-ev-readiness).

References

Hill, Margo, and John David (J.D.) Tovey III. 2023. “Tribal Zoning, Sovereignty in Action.” Zoning Practice 40 (November). www.planning.org/publications/document/9279739/.