BEST PRACTICES FOR MULTIFAMILY CHARGING INCENTIVES IN CALIFORNIA

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The State of Multifamily Charging in California

A lack of home charging is a major barrier to owning an electric vehicle (EV), as most Americans want to charge at home. But multifamily residents have less control over installing charging. In California, EV drivers are about half as likely to live in multifamily housing compared to non-EV drivers. An EVs for All America survey found that only five to six percent of Californians living in condominiums or apartments have adequate home charging, partly explaining low adoption.

Funding and complementary support for multifamily charging can lower barriers for property owners and unlock a new wave of EV adoption among the one-third of California households in multifamily units. This would also boost EV uptake among low-income residents, as over 60 percent of multifamily residents are low-income. EVs can save drivers money on maintenance and fuel, particularly when they charge at home, but many multifamily housing residents cannot yet realize these savings. These savings are particularly critical for rideshare drivers, who are more likely to live in multifamily households and will increasingly switch to EVs due to California's regulations. Home charging can save them thousands of dollars compared to only public charging, due to lower charging costs and reduced downtime.

Although 15 states and DC, including California, have building codes with EV charging provisions, these typically apply only to new construction. Retrofitting existing buildings can be more complex and costly, and the value of installing chargers may not be clear to property owners. Incentives can help. Recognizing this, the California Energy Commission has encouraged multifamily charging over the last several years via about $216 million through the Communities in Charge and Reliable, Equitable, and Accessible Charging for Multi-family Housing (REACH) programs, funded by the state's Cap-and-Invest program.

While these programs are well-subscribed, much of the multifamily market remains untapped. Communities in Charge focuses heavily on shovel-ready projects, favoring applicants with expertise and other funding sources; REACH assists early-stage projects from start to finish, a

process not easily scalable, as demonstrated by substantial oversubscription to the program in every solicitation to date. Communities in Charge has funded deployment of about 7,469 Level 2 chargers at multifamily properties as of June 2026, with thousands more in the pipeline; we estimate that at least ten times as many chargers will be needed to cover all large multifamily properties in California.

Sustained near-term support that reduces the financial and administrative burden on property owners and managers is essential to accelerate multifamily charging deployment. **These public investments earn returns for California residents in many ways, such as supporting local EV charging jobs, delivering health and environmental benefits, and allowing EV drivers to save money on charging.** This brief highlights best practices from charging incentive programs in California and beyond, bolstered with stakeholder input.

Lessons Learned from California and Beyond

The following insights were informed by interviews with stakeholders who implement and interact with programs in California or other states. These include representatives from the California government, other state governments, utilities, charging service providers, nonprofits and advocacy organizations, academia, and organized labor (see more in Appendix B). The following sections provide background on current California programs as well as lessons learned on program structure, requirements, and support identified in these stakeholder interviews and research (see Appendix A for an overview of all lessons learned).

Incentive Size, Structure, and Type

EXAMPLES IN CALIFORNIA

- **Communities in Charge:** Flat-rate rebate with base amount of $8,500 per Level 2 port and $2,000 per Level 1 port (bonus rebate amount for underserved communities); no specific cost share required
- **REACH:** Grants for large-scale deployments (20 percent cost share, 10 percent for underserved communities) of Level 2 chargers; cap of $12,500 per port

Incentives that cover all of a property owner or manager's capital costs help overcome their hesitancy to install charging. Studies (e.g., Veloz and International Council on Clean Transportation) estimate capital cost at about $4,000 to $7,000 per Level 2 port. Most stakeholders agreed that the incentive levels for programs like Communities in Charge are adequate to encourage Level 2 charger deployment at many properties, but the size of the incentive is more

critical for low-income communities, disadvantaged communities, and Tribal communities,[1] where the amount often determines if the project moves forward or not. Across the country, most state and utility charging programs for multifamily housing provide between $1,000 and $10,000 per port. Typically, programs have higher incentives for these communities or lower (or no) cost share requirements (e.g., REACH), addressing their increased barriers to entry. Communities in Charge covers part of the capital costs, but the applicant must secure their own funding for site readiness and other costs incurred before applying for the incentive. As a result, public funds can go further by leveraging private investment, but the program risks funding projects that may have gone forward regardless. When additional investment is needed for electrical infrastructure (e.g., panel upgrades, additional meters, line extensions, or transformers), utility make-ready programs can help fill gaps and often have positive ratepayer impacts.[2]

Flat rebates are easiest to apply for and administer; applicants prefer to receive rebates up front to provide certainty. Reimbursement-based programs can be more burdensome for applicants, increasing the likelihood of delays or non-payment if documentation requirements are not met. On the other hand, they can provide a steady stream of income throughout a project if reimbursements are made at the same time that costs are incurred (rather than at the end).

Application Windows

EXAMPLES IN CALIFORNIA

- **Communities in Charge:** Four "waves" of funding to date; announced six to nine months before applications open, with about four to five months to apply
- **REACH:** Three solicitations to date, with about four months to apply

Applicants urged the need for more predictable and longer application windows. For example, some programs (e.g., Charge Ready NY) take applications on a rolling basis over the course of several years. Generally, longer application windows are more accessible; however, a waved approach (as with Communities in Charge and REACH) can also ensure lessons learned from early stages of the program can be incorporated later. For example, in its fourth wave, administrators of Communities in Charge implemented a rebate model and extended the application window, after learning these adjustments would be more attractive for applicants and less burdensome to administer.

[1] Collectively, these communities are referred to as underserved areas in this fact sheet.

[2] For example, a case study in New York shows that utility charging investments can have a neutral or positive impact on electricity rates; similarly, a study in California showed that revenues from EVs exceed their associated system costs.

Site Readiness

EXAMPLES IN CALIFORNIA

- **Communities in Charge:** Explicitly intended for sites that are ready for deployment, with highest priority to sites with site design and permits (or equivalent paperwork) completed
- **REACH:** Particular sites do not need to be scoped before application, and funds are to be used across multiple sites

Permitting, utility coordination, site design, technology procurement, and other "ready-to-go" requirements prior to applying for incentives have been cited as the biggest sources of delays or barriers for multifamily housing applicants by many stakeholders. Program administrators stress the importance of site readiness requirements to ensure public funds are used effectively and applicants can bring sites online in a timely fashion. If these readiness requirements are in place, administrators must allocate adequate time and resources for interested applicants to have these requirements met by the time the application opens. Some stakeholders find predictable release dates and clear communication on pre-application requirements for new funding waves to be particularly useful in meeting these requirements. Offering flexibility for sites with unique circumstances is also important; Communities in Charge, for example, allows make-ready paperwork to substitute for having a permit in some cases before applying for an incentive. In general, as charging becomes more widespread, high standards for site readiness may become even more of a barrier to unlocking the next tranche of less-prepared property owners and residents.

Technology Requirements

EXAMPLES IN CALIFORNIA

- **Communities in Charge:** Level 2 and Level 1 charging installations eligible in the latest funding wave, with eligible equipment list
- **REACH:** Only Level 2 charging installations eligible in the latest solicitation

Most multifamily charging programs focus on Level 2 chargers, with many stakeholders stating that Level 2 generates interest from property owners and managers, drives additional EV adoption, and ensures equitable, reliable access. Level 1 charging is significantly less expensive and, in some cases, can electrify every parking spot rather than a few shared spots, but may not fully recharge an EV overnight. Multiple program implementors shared that while some stakeholders are vocal in their support for Level 1 charging, applicants rarely request it. Despite less interest in Level 1, some

programs offer it as an option so applicants can choose the solution that best meets their needs, including a combination of Level 1 and 2. Additionally, requirements for interoperability, high uptime, and data reporting can add complexity for applicants but create a better user experience and reduce the risk for stranded assets. Communities in Charge provides an approved equipment list to ensure projects comply with regulations, which requires significant effort to keep updated as policy and technology changes. REACH was designed to be more flexible, but that requires one-off assessments. Costs and benefits of additional technology requirements must be considered thoughtfully, and property owners and managers should understand the long-term benefits.

Billing Residents

EXAMPLES IN CALIFORNIA

- **Communities in Charge and REACH**: No specific requirements for pricing or fees, allowing flexibility for recipients

There are many models for billing residents for charging, including fixed fees, energy-based fees, time-based fees, or (often) a combination. Most incentive programs leave the cost recovery method up to the individual property owner or manager to maximize flexibility, although some have price transparency requirements. Billing models that allow residents to take advantage of time-of-use rates has benefits for residents and the grid. A recent EVs for All America survey indicated that many California multifamily residents may be willing to pay up to $50 per month for a dedicated charging spot in addition to the cost of electricity, which can help motivate property owners and managers.

Skilled Labor

EXAMPLES IN CALIFORNIA

- All state-funded charging programs require Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Training Program certified electricians

Preparing sites, installing charging equipment, and maintenance over time all require skilled and trusted electrical workers. Some stakeholders shared that finding the right contractors and technicians can be a barrier, as some lack expertise in charging infrastructure specifically, especially in remote areas. As part of California Assembly Bill 841, state-funded charging programs must utilize electricians certified by the Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Training Program, which ensures electricians are prepared for these projects and provides a standard of quality across sites; the bill was championed by organized labor.

Hands-On Support

EXAMPLES IN CALIFORNIA

- **Communities in Charge:** Administrators provide significant online resources and ad-hoc applicant support (with priority technical assistance for projects meeting readiness and equity criteria)
- **REACH:** Sites do not have to be ready for installation before receiving awards, and fewer awards allow for more hands-on support throughout the process

While costs are often the biggest cited barrier to adoption, navigating the complex process of site design, permitting, incentive applications, procurement, construction, and maintenance is also a major challenge. Stakeholders must be dedicated to project success, sometimes over the course of multiple years, which will not scale to the entire market without significant hands-on support. Current California programs offer applicant support through detailed resource documentation and public engagements like webinars; however, charging service providers or third parties often complete applications due to the complexity of navigating those resources. Rather than simply making resource content readily available online, hands-on support is often needed for applicants to understand the costs and steps involved from site readiness to operation and maintenance, and to understand the benefits. Technical assistance programs, including external groups like Charge at Home, are critical in providing education and support for property owners and managers, especially catered programming for underserved communities. Checklists accompanying detailed guidance can also aid applicants. Finally, engaging with networks representing renters or homeowner associations would improve awareness of incentives and increase uptake.

Ensuring Equity

EXAMPLES IN CALIFORNIA

- Legislation requires 35 percent of funding from Cap-and-Invest programs go to disadvantaged and low-income communities
- **Communities in Charge:** 50 percent of total funding reserved for underserved communities; bonus rebates for underserved communities
- **REACH:** 50 percent of ports for each award must be installed in underserved communities and lower cost share requirements

Equity is a guiding principle for California programs. At least 35 percent of the Cap-and-Invest program funding must go to “priority populations” (e.g., disadvantaged or low-income communities), which is supported by most Californians. Communities in Charge and REACH both

include deployment targets for underserved communities, as well as higher incentives. These equity provisions are common among many other state and utility programs. Communities in Charge also prioritizes projects denoted as "community connections", which emphasize serving multifamily housing across a variety of community centers like public schools and healthcare facilities. Most stakeholders did not find it particularly troublesome to find eligible sites in underserved areas, while at least one stakeholder expressed it being challenging due to older infrastructure and higher average costs in these areas. Administrative challenges appear to persist in defining what it means for charging incentives to "benefit" these communities and ensuring enough qualified technicians in low-income and rural areas are available for projects to meet program requirements.

Funding Needs

Based on a survey of multifamily residents by EVs for All America and the current number of multifamily units in California from the American Community Survey, we estimate that **at least 4.5 million multifamily units in California do not have adequate access to on-site charging today.** To illustrate the funding needed to expand access to these residents, we consider an incentive program with the following characteristics:

1. **Eligibility**. Retrofits of existing buildings with ten or more units would be eligible for the program for cost-efficiency. This represents about 57 percent of all multifamily units in California.
2. **Coverage**. Awardees would provide charging for 15 to 25 percent of parking spaces at each building, likely covering most units with shared parking.
3. **Incentive Size.** The incentive would cover the entire capital cost to install a Level 2 charger in each eligible parking space. Studies (e.g., Veloz and International Council on Clean Transportation) estimate capital cost at about $4,000 to $7,000 per port for multifamily housing, and we use a value of $5,000 for this analysis.
4. **Duration.** We assumed the program will initially last three years, in line with the duration of the California Energy Commission's latest multiyear transportation spending plan.

Barriers besides costs exist that keep property owners and managers from installing EV charging, and no single program will be able to move the entire multifamily housing market. Therefore, we estimate costs for a range of possible program targets, defined as the portion of multifamily units in California that will have access to multifamily charging, for consideration (see Table 1).

A program that targets the untapped portions of the multifamily market will give property owners more experience installing and maintaining charging and give a significant boost to EV adoption among multifamily residents — creating the conditions for future growth in demand for multifamily charging with lower or no level of government funding.

Table 1: Estimated Funding Needs for Various Program Targets

Program Target (% of Units with Access)	Estimated Chargers Installed Over Three Years	Estimated Total Cost Over Three Years	Estimated Average Cost per Year
20%	10,900 - 19,600	$54 - $98 million	$18 - $33 million
50%	34,200 - 58,800	$171 - $294 million	$57 - $98 million
80%	57,400 - 98,000	$287 - $490 million	$96 - $163 million

Note: For context, a survey from EVs for All America estimates that only about 5-6 percent of multifamily residents in California have access to sufficient charging today.

Source: Atlas analysis based on the program characteristics above. Data from the American Community Survey and EVs for All America.

Putting these values in perspective, the California Energy Commission's Clean Transportation Program has provided about $2.3 billion in incentives for zero-emission vehicles and infrastructure since it was created in 2007, and Communities in Charge and REACH made about $95 million available in 2025. REACH has been consistently oversubscribed; the California Energy Commission has ended up awarding significantly more funding than stated in the original funding opportunity in all three program years. Further, federal clean vehicle incentives were expected to provide nearly $400 billion in funding across the country through 2032 before they were phased out early in 2025, a significant portion of which would have likely gone to California due to its high EV adoption.

For California to bolster EV adoption in a largely untapped market, more financial support will be needed to expand multifamily charging access. Funding can go even further towards getting more Californians in an EV when paired with incentives for new and used vehicle purchases.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix A: California Program Summary

Table 2 provides an overview of provisions in the Communities in Charge and REACH programs, along with lessons learned from those programs and other similar programs in California and other states.

Table 2: Key Principles and Challenges for Multifamily Charging Incentives

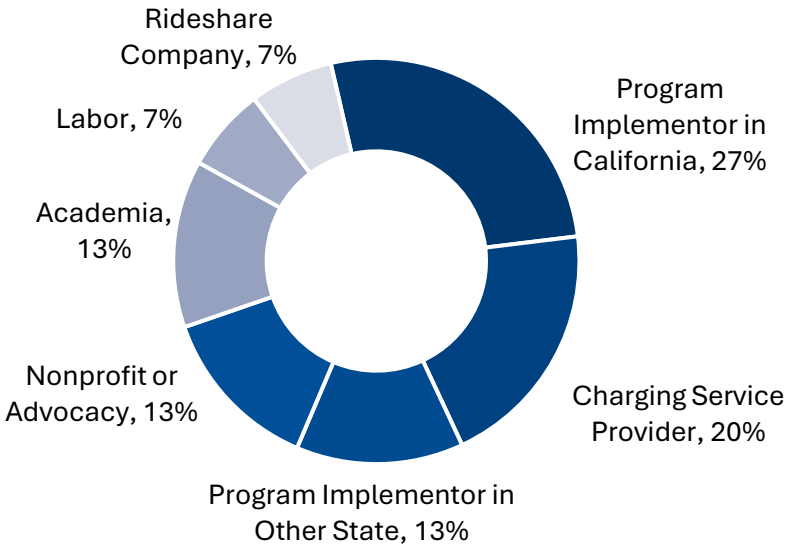
Provision Type	Examples in California Programs	Lessons Learned
Incentive Size, Structure, and Type	• Communities in Charge: Flat-rate rebate; base amount $8,500 per Level 2 port and $2,000 per Level 1 port (bonus underserved communities); no specific cost share required • REACH: Grants for large-scale deployments (20 percent cost share, 10 percent for underserved communities) of Level 2 chargers; cap of $12,500 per port	• Upfront incentives are preferable; otherwise, need adequate application time and clear program guidance well in advance • Flat rebates, rather than reimbursements, also streamline processes and add predictability • Allowing properties to decide the charging fee structure helps with buy-in, but price transparency is important
Application Windows	• Communities in Charge: Four “waves” of funding to date; announced six to nine months before applications open, with about four to five months to apply • REACH: Three solicitations to date, with about four months to apply	• Longer and predictable and application windows are needed, especially when there are site readiness requirements
Site Readiness	• Communities in Charge: Explicitly intended for sites that are ready for deployment, with highest priority to sites with site design and permits (or equivalent paperwork) completed • REACH: Particular sites do not need to be scoped before application, and funds are to be used across multiple sites	• Focusing on shovel-ready sites and covering a portion of costs can help public funds go further, but favors projects close to completion without incentives • The process is complex and expensive; property owners and managers want incentives before construction starts • If there are readiness requirements, need upfront support to get sites ready
Technology Requirements	• Communities in Charge: Level 2 and Level 1 charging installations eligible in the latest funding wave, with eligible equipment list	• Level 1 charging presents a good low-cost option for some sites, but Level 2 charging encourages more

Provision Type	Examples in California Programs	Lessons Learned
	• REACH: Only Level 2 charging installations eligible in the latest solicitation	property owners to adopt charging and more residents to buy an EV • Performance requirements also boost adoption
Billing Residents	• Communities in Charge and REACH: No specific requirements for pricing or fees, allowing flexibility for recipients	• Billing models are typically left up to recipients • Passing on time-of-use savings benefits residents and the grid • Many residents in California are willing to pay more for a dedicated charging spot
Skilled Labor	• All state-funded charging programs require Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Training Program certified electricians	• Ensuring applicants have easy access to certified contractors is also critical
Hands-On Support	• Communities in Charge: Administrators provide significant online resources and ad-hoc applicant support (with priority technical assistance for projects meeting readiness and equity criteria) • REACH: Sites do not have to be ready for installation before receiving awards, and fewer awards allow for more hands-on support throughout the process	• Incentives alone are not enough to drive adoption; adequate support needed to help property owners and managers through the processes of applying, installing charging, and maintaining the infrastructure • Applicants are not motivated if the process is too burdensome; underserved communities typically face higher barriers
Ensuring Equity	• Legislation requires 35 percent Cap-and-Invest funding go to disadvantaged and low-income communities • Communities in Charge: 50 percent of total funding reserved for underserved communities; bonus rebates for underserved communities • REACH: 50 percent of ports for each award must be installed in underserved communities and lower cost share requirements	• Most programs cover a higher portion of (or all) project costs in underserved areas to address their unique barriers

Appendix B: Interview Methodology

This brief was informed by a broad set of perspectives on multifamily charging programs in California and other states. We interviewed stakeholders from the California government, nonprofit organizations, a labor organization, academic researchers studying EV infrastructure, charging service providers, utilities, other state governments, and a rideshare company (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Breakdown of Interviewees by Organization Type



Note: Program Implementors (in California and other states) include government entities, utilities, and third party implementors, depending on the program.

For program implementors in California or other states, we asked questions like:

- How were the program structure and goals developed?
- What were key program design questions (for example, incentive size, eligible costs, technology requirements, project eligibility) and what were the implications?
- Which parts of the program design or implementation were challenging for the implementor or recipient, and which parts worked well?
- What were key areas of feedback from stakeholders?

For representatives of program recipients in California or other states, we asked questions like:

- Which parts of the program design or implementation were challenging to navigate, and which parts worked well?
- If you have used multiple programs within California or across states, which programs have been easier to use or more effective than others and why?