

# GET TO KNOW PUBLIC POWER



A guide for utility board and council members

# WHAT IS PUBLIC POWER?

Public power utilities provide electricity to local homes and businesses. We are owned by the community and run as a division of local government – just like our public schools and libraries.

Citizens have a voice in utility decisions and policymaking. We are typically governed by a local city council or by an elected or appointed board.

We are sometimes described as municipal utilities (or munis). We prefer to use the terms PUBLIC POWER and COMMUNITY-OWNED because many of our customers don't know that they own our utility. With the right messaging, we can help instill pride of ownership, and earn their long-term loyalty.



# WHAT MAKES US DIFFERENT

Public power utilities – owned by the communities they serve – provide electricity to 15% of electric customers across the United States.

Most other customers are served by one of two other types of electric utilities. Publicly traded or investor-owned companies supply power to 68% of the nation's electricity customers. Customer-owned rural electric cooperatives serve 13% of electricity customers.

About 4% of customers, most of whom are in Texas, get their electricity from “power marketers.”

## PUBLIC POWER IS DISTINGUISHED BY

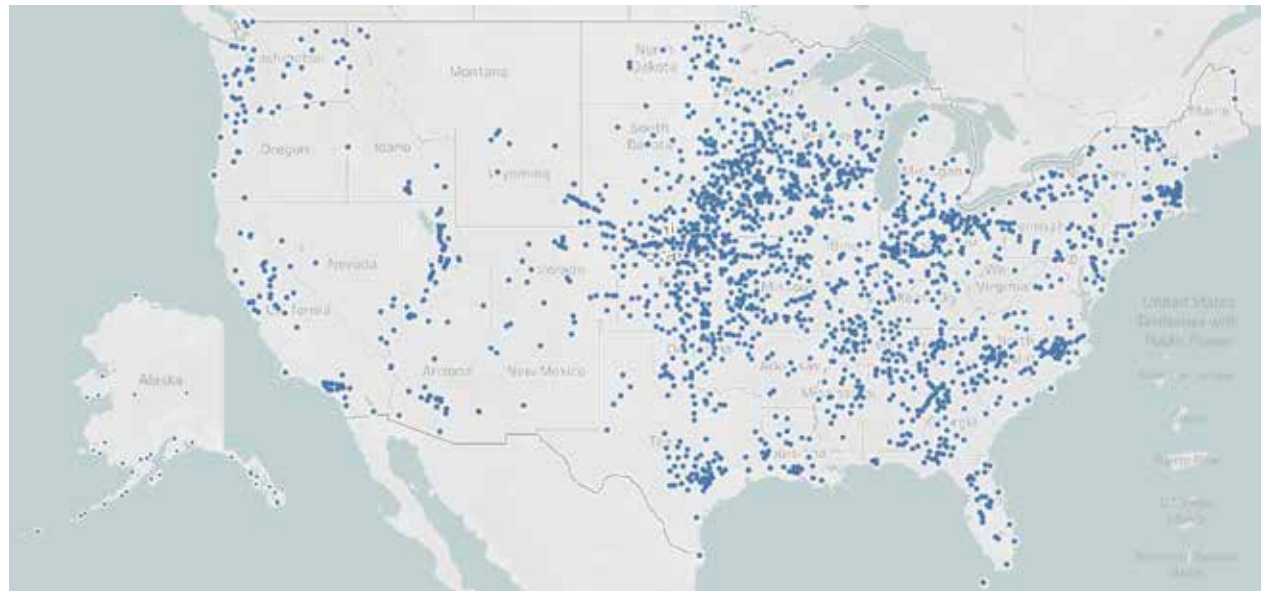
- Operating with a not-for-profit status
- Having local ownership and control
- Requiring transparency and accountability to the community
- Having limited state/federal regulation of rates and jurisdictional issues
- Being able to raise funds for infrastructure projects by issuing tax-exempt municipal bonds



# WHERE IS PUBLIC POWER?

We are one of 2,011 public power utilities in the U.S. Collectively, we bring electricity to 49 million people, which means that 1 in 7 electricity customers is served by a public power utility. Public power serves customers in 49 states (all except Hawaii) and 5 U.S. territories.

Public power serves large cities like Austin, Nashville, Los Angeles, and Seattle, as well as small villages, rural towns, and the Navajo Nation. Most public power utilities have fewer than 4,000 customers in cities or small towns.



See a map of public power utilities in the U.S. at [www.publicpower.org/where-public-power](http://www.publicpower.org/where-public-power)

# TOP 5 BENEFITS OF PUBLIC POWER

While public power utilities offer many benefits, here are five (see the following pages) that are important to talk about with customers.

# COMMUNITY OWNED

Our customers are our friends and neighbors. We provide local jobs and support the local economy. Our community's citizens have a voice in making decisions for the utility.



# NOT FOR PROFIT

Surplus revenues don't go to outside shareholders — they stay in the community. Revenues are invested in system improvements, shared with the local government, or offset electric rate increases. On average, public power utilities pay 5.6 percent of electric operating revenues back to the community — through taxes, fees, and special services. Compared to private utilities, public power gives 27 percent more back to the community.





# AFFORDABLE

Homes powered by public power utilities pay nearly 10 percent less than homes powered by investor-owned companies. Businesses that get electricity from public power utilities also pay less.





# RELIABLE

Customers of public power utilities lose power less often. Customers of a public power utility are on average without power for just 74 minutes a year, compared to customers of private utilities that lose power for an average 142 minutes a year — provided there are no major adverse events.



# RESPONSIVE

As a public power utility, we deliver what the community wants. We are committed to the highest level of customer service. We support local economic development, demonstrate environmental stewardship, and invest back in the community.



# PUBLIC POWER'S VALUE

As a public power utility, we are much more than the sum of our financial and physical assets. We promote a high quality of life for our community through long-term and ongoing contributions, as we:

- Create and keep local jobs
- Keep utility revenue local – reinvesting dollars into the community year after year
- Promote economic development through reliability, responsiveness to business needs, and attractive rates
- Care for the environment – doing what is best for our community's health and well-being
- Help the city save by sharing expenses for a variety of business and community services and achieving operational efficiencies
- Keep rates low to increase net income for local residents, businesses, and the city
- Ensure reliable electric service, which means fewer lost opportunities for our citizens



*Learn more about how public power adds value to communities:*

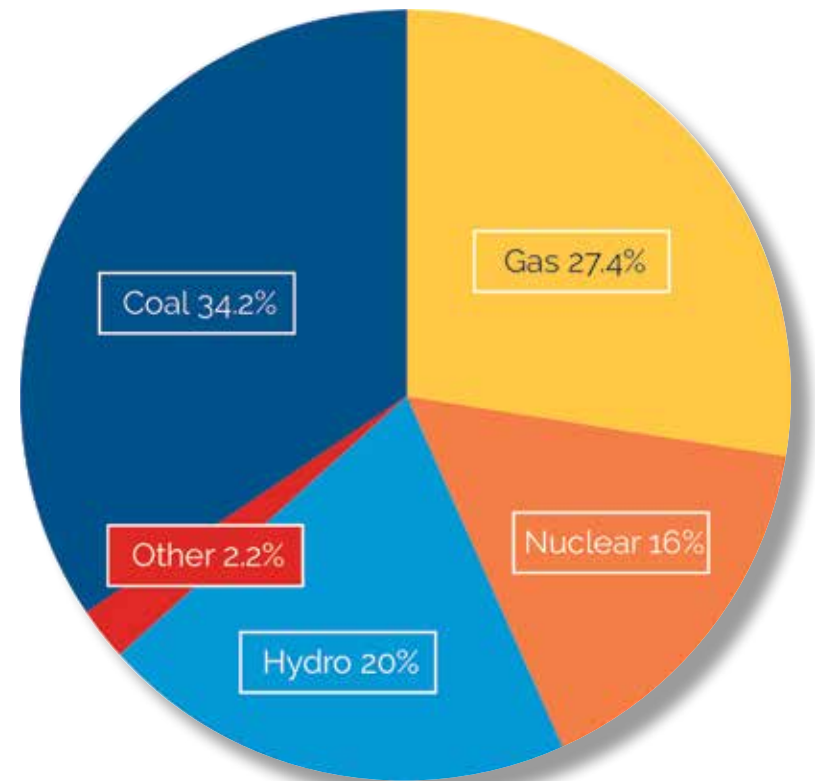
*[www.publicpower.org/periodical/article/know-your-worth-show-your-worth-determining-true-value-public-power-utility](http://www.publicpower.org/periodical/article/know-your-worth-show-your-worth-determining-true-value-public-power-utility)*

*[www.publicpower.org/resource/positioning-your-community-succeed-sellout-evaluation](http://www.publicpower.org/resource/positioning-your-community-succeed-sellout-evaluation)*

# PUBLIC POWER GENERATION SOURCES

We buy power from wholesale electricity markets through our joint action agency, which uses the power of collective bargaining to get us good prices.

Public power across the U.S. collectively gets less energy from coal and more from renewable sources, compared to other types of electric utilities. From 2005 to 2017, public power reduced carbon dioxide emissions by 33% (compared to a 24% reduction by the rest of the electric sector).



*The generation, transmission, and retail distribution of electricity is a complex process. Get an overview at [www.publicpower.org/public-power/electricity-basics](http://www.publicpower.org/public-power/electricity-basics). You can also read *Electric Utility Basics* and other publications listed at [insert link once webpage is created with full list of resources Pam provided].*

# PRIDE IN PUBLIC POWER

See why policymakers like you are proud to belong  
to public power communities





“Public power provides maximum value to Idaho Falls’ citizens. In addition to providing some of the lowest power rates in the country, the power generation resources our local utility owns are 100% carbon-free. And the new power and broadband resources we are developing are cutting edge and innovative. Why? Because we live here too. Local, public ownership of our power utility translates into management that is completely responsive to residents, businesses and other citizens in our community who rely on the services we provide. Our customers are our neighbors.”

Mayor Rebecca Casper  
IDAHO FALLS, IDAHO

“Public power enriches the lives of our community by providing low-cost electricity and governance of the provider at the local level. Additionally, revenue generated by a municipal utility, such as the Kissimmee Utility Authority, is invested back into the community through infrastructure improvements and various community engagement and outreach programs.”

Mayor Jose Alvarez  
KISSIMMEE, FLORIDA





“As a community served by a public power agency, the City of Huntingburg has received many benefits. Our citizens have safe, reliable energy at a low cost. But we also have a voice with regard to the decisions being made about the future of our energy supply. Having local control on such a vital resource is very beneficial. And we have been able to leverage our utility as an engine for economic development. The locally controlled rates and quality service provided to our residents are a big advantage in attracting and retaining local development.”

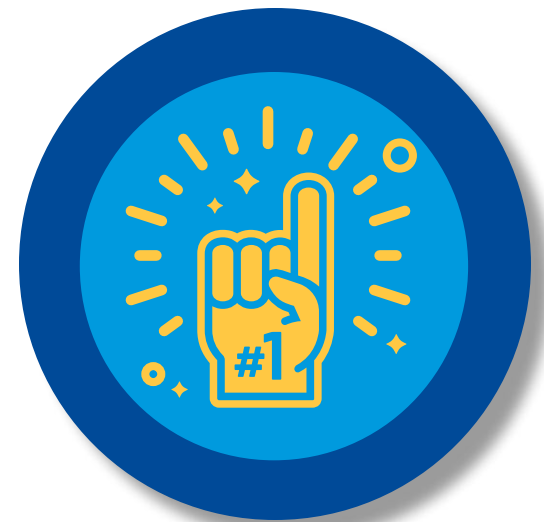
Mayor Denny Spinner  
HUNTINGBURG, INDIANA



# HOW CAN YOU BE A PUBLIC POWER AMBASSADOR?

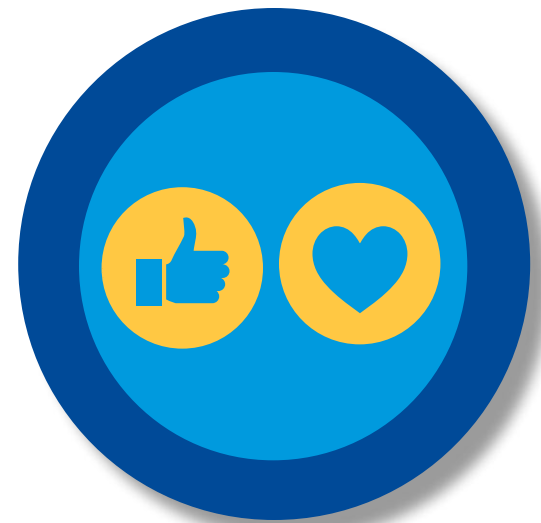
Your word can do more to promote our utility than any billboard, bill stuffer, or newspaper article we place. Here are some simple ways you can share the benefits of public power:

- Talk to your family, friends, and colleagues – tell them how public power makes our community special.
- Encourage young people you know to consider applying for jobs at our utility.
- Share information about utility programs or important updates/meetings on Nextdoor or neighborhood listservs/email groups.
- Invite your fellow citizens to come to our public meetings and be involved in decision making for the utility.
- Partner with us to volunteer in community activities, or tell us about causes we can support as a utility.



# SHARE PUBLIC POWER BENEFITS ON YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA

You can start by liking and sharing Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or LinkedIn posts from our utility and from the American Public Power Association at least once a week. Once you get comfortable, you can share your own messages and photos about how our utility is helping to build a strong community. Hashtags are important as they help to amplify your voice – try to use #PublicPower and #CommunityPowered when you share or post.



# OUR NATIONAL ASSOCIATION

The American Public Power Association is the voice of not-for-profit, community-owned utilities that power 2,000 towns and cities nationwide. It represents public power before the federal government to protect the interests of the more than 49 million people that public power utilities serve, and the 93,000 people we collectively employ. The Association advocates and advises on electricity policy, technology, trends, training, and operations.

Our utility is a member of the American Public Power Association. This means YOU as an individual have access to the benefits of membership – you can network with your peers, learn, grow, and make your voice heard in Washington, DC.



Powering Strong Communities

*The Association offers many other events, publications, and online resources tailored to the needs of public power governing bodies. Learn more at [www.PublicPower.org/Governance-resources](http://www.PublicPower.org/Governance-resources).*

# HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED WITH THE ASSOCIATION:

- Keep up with public power and energy industry news by subscribing to the Public Power Daily.
- Dive into how public power utilities are handling hot topics and trends by reading Public Power Magazine, published every two months.
- Plan to attend the annual Legislative Rally in Washington DC for to get an update on policy issues and to meet with our elected representatives on public power priorities.
- Connect in-person with your peers at the National Conference, public power's largest gathering of leaders, board and council members.
- Join the governance listserv to discuss common interests and issues with your counterparts from other cities.

