Background
Clean energy technology is available to too few residents of Silicon Valley. For example, rooftop solar systems often require large upfront investments, which put them out of reach for low-income families. Similarly, without financial incentives, buying or leasing an electric vehicle (EV) can be prohibitively expensive. The limited number of EV charging stations in low-income neighborhoods and in multi-family housing units represents another deterrent to widespread EV use. To address inequities in the adoption of clean energy technology, Acterra convened an invitation-only group of 42 experts from 33 organizations on October 18, 2018 to prototype solutions for accelerating the pace of adoption of clean energy technologies across all income levels. This event, Clean Energy Access for All: A “Design Sprint” on Funding Models, catalyzed the creation of a webinar, working groups, and a white paper. See more information at https://www.acterra.org.clean-energy-for-all.

Policy Working Group
A short-term Policy Working Group was formed after the sprint to identify policy barriers to achieving clean energy access for all. The group met once per month from January – May 2019. Members included:

- Debbie Mytels, Acterra (chair)
- Julie Noblitt, Acterra
- Jodi Pincus, Rising Sun Energy Center
- Julia Hatton, Rising Sun Energy Center
- Charlse Chang, Peninsula Clean Energy
- Jasneet Sharma, San Mateo County

Findings
The group identified the following policy barriers to progress on making clean energy accessible to all, regardless of income.

Funding Requirements and Limitations
— 20% local cost shares – NGOs and local governments rarely have such matching funds
— Short funding cycles – failure to recognize that organizing for change takes time
— Lack of funding for community outreach -- NGOs need resources to connect with low-income residents who are hard to contact because they work multiple jobs, don’t speak English, etc.

Lack of Broad Representation among Decision-Makers Leads to Short-Sighted Policies
— Lack of low-income representation among policy makers
— NGOs need capacity building: salaries adequate to support employee retention, training and staff development
Funding Policies that Limit Potential for Wholistic Change
— Cost effectiveness calculations don’t always support other values, including “co-benefits” such as improved air quality and comfort in residences that are hard to quantify but which are very important
— Solar systems installed with cap & trade funds can only cover current demand (not future needs, such as EV adoption by resident)
— Many low-income people are dependent on public transit; fare reductions and other subsidies to support transit use should be considered another form of clean energy, since it decreases carbon emissions.
— Prioritize meeting the needs of those whose needs are largest – this will create many social and cost-benefit synergies

Specific Areas Needing More Funds
— More support needed for EV purchases, chargers in multi-family housing, etc.
— Support for implementing “Reach codes” (that stretch beyond state minimum requirements in building codes)
— Comprehensive, energy efficient, safe and healthy housing for all

Policy Initiatives to Support Greater Low-Income Access to Clean Energy
— On-bill financing
— Zero interest energy loan fund
— Waive license fees for EVs purchased by low-income people

Other Policies that Can Support Broad Adoption of Clean Energy
— Require energy efficient and renewable energy upgrades at time of home sale
— “Virtual net metering” that would allow individual small investors to derive financial benefit from purchasing shares of large solar installations, even though they may not own a roof suitable for a solar collector

Recommended Next Steps
Identification of policy barriers is just a first step. The number and variety of policy barriers represented in the list above suggests that further triage is needed to prioritize which factors have the greatest impact. The organizations represented in the Policy WG are of course already working on many of these barriers. For the other barriers, campaign “owners” – especially governmental and foundation funders – need to be identified. To succeed in the long-term work of moving the needle, partnerships must be created with elected representatives and community-based organizations to raise funds, get measures on California ballots, and/or launch public education campaigns.