



**USC ANNENBERG CENTER FOR CLIMATE JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION
RELEASES SEASON THREE OF ITS ENERGY TRANSITION PODCAST**

***Electric Futures: The Data Center Next Door* Debuts Episode 1 on April 9, 2026 Across
Platforms**

Season three of *Electric Futures*, the USC energy transition podcast, takes listeners back to California's Imperial Valley, a region explored throughout season one in connection with the county's potential for lithium extraction. A lot has changed since then.

Plans for lithium extraction are stalled due to lawsuits and a new set of developers has come to town: hyperscalers. Host Charles Zukoski, the Robert E. Vivian Professor in Energy Resources and Professor of Chemical Engineering and Materials Science and Biomedical Engineering, has been tracking the news since last summer, when word began to circulate that one of the largest data centers in the country might tap into the region's rich geothermal resources.

Demand for data centers—the physical embodiment of AI—is growing so rapidly that their global electricity consumption will more than double by 2030. But pushback from communities is also growing. Concerned residents worry about rising electricity bills, environmental degradation, and AI itself. Does the benefit of data center development in places like Imperial Valley outweigh the costs?

Leaders and experts interviewed in season three include:

- Tom Steyer, Democratic candidate for Governor of California
- Gilberto Manzanarez, Founder of Valle Imperial Resiste
- Diane Papan, Democratic California State Assembly 21st District
- Kelly Sanders, Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the USC Viterbi School of Engineering and former Assistant Director of Energy Systems Innovation at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) under President Biden
- John Reynolds, President of the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC)
- Ryan Kelley, member of the Imperial Valley Board of Supervisors

To support communities and communicators, resources developed for season three include:

- A Spanish-language episode summarizing findings from season three
- A step-by-step manual for creating a climate-oriented podcast
- An in-depth guide for understanding key issues surrounding data center development

Accolades for *Electric Futures* include:

- 2025 LA Press Club SoCal Journalism Awards finalist, Limited Series Podcast
- 2024 Quill Podcast Awards nominee, Best Science and Medicine Podcast
- Charted on the Top 50 Science Podcasts chart on Spotify and Apple Podcasts
- Featured in the LA Times, La Opinion, and NPR's KCRW

Past seasons of *Electric Futures*

Season one, *Electric Futures: Lithium Valley* (2024), explores narratives from the Imperial Valley in Southern California, an area rich with community – and critical minerals – on the brink of an energy transformation so big, it could completely change the lives of residents. The second season, *Electric Futures: Your Community, Electrified* (2025), focuses on the Shadow Mountain community in San Bernardino County, where residents are trying to build an energy-independent community that could serve as a model for the future. *My Story is a Climate Story* (2026) is a special season that explores the aftermath of the devastating January wildfires that displaced more than 150,000 Los Angeles residents and reshaped entire communities.

About the team

In addition to the host, former USC provost and member of the National Academy of Engineering Charles Zukoski, the team includes CCJC director Allison Agsten as executive producer, a veteran of Spotify's top podcasting studios and USC Annenberg adjunct professor Mallory Carra, concurrent undergraduate at USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences and graduate student at USC Iovine and Young Academy Natalie Lopez as associate producer, USC Annenberg public diplomacy graduate Spencer Cline as associate producer and editor, and Imperial Valley College student Tahjah Fortune as production assistant with cover art by USC Annenberg journalism undergraduate Kim Ly.

Tune in

Listeners can find all seasons of *Electric Futures* on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and Amazon Music. Follow along on Instagram at @usc_electricfutures. For further information, email redhot@usc.edu. Funding for the podcast and associated research is provided by USC's Office of the Provost, with additional support from the USC Viterbi School of Engineering.

Reach out

For media inquiries, including to schedule interviews with host Charles Zukoski or executive producer Allison Agsten, contact the Center for Climate Journalism and Communication at redhot@usc.edu. USC Annenberg's Climate Journalism and Communication was established in 2022 to empower journalists and other communicators to tell stories about climate change. It is supported with funding from Bloomberg Philanthropies, the Beedie Foundation, the Manaaki Foundation, and Vere Initiatives.