



The Grid Transformation Playbook

from TRC

Seven Strategies for Achieving Resiliency, Reliability
and Sustainability at Lower Costs and Increased
Customer Value



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Introduction

Today's utility companies face daunting regulatory, environmental, operational and technological challenges. For over a century, utility companies have successfully delivered reliable electricity to homes and businesses through incremental improvements and steady capital investment. Yet unprecedented change—from the exponential rise in energy demand driven by AI data centers, to aging infrastructure requiring modernization, climate-driven operational complexity and evolving customer expectations—cannot be met with incremental adjustments. It requires a fundamentally new approach.

Since the early 2000s, utilities have invested heavily in modernization, with U.S. investor-owned utilities spending [\\$186.4 billion in 2024](#) alone on infrastructure and grid upgrades. Yet progress has been stagnant. Despite these investments, [21% of utilities](#) report minimal progress toward their modernization goals. Traditional planning methods, such as deterministic forecasting, siloed engineering disciplines and worst-case capacity assumptions, are no longer adequate for managing today's dynamic grid environment. The rise of distributed energy resources, variable renewable generation and unpredictable demand patterns makes conventional approaches insufficient.

This playbook offers utilities a bold, proven alternative: a lifecycle-informed and flexible approach to grid modernization that prioritizes systems thinking, advanced analytics, digital engagement, and continuous adaptation. Rather than deploying conventional infrastructure in isolation, forward-thinking utilities are orchestrating their grids as integrated ecosystems. By combining probabilistic planning, transparent customer partnerships, policy innovation and embedded security, utilities can achieve transformational value that benefits customers and the bottom line.

The Seven Strategies

The seven strategies outlined in this playbook provide a practical roadmap for utilities to modernize grid operations and thrive in the new era of energy demand. Each strategy builds on proven methodologies and industry experience, delivering measurable improvements in reliability, resilience, cost-effectiveness, and customer satisfaction. When implemented together, these strategies empower utilities to enhance reliability, defer capital-intensive infrastructure through non-wires alternatives, accelerate decarbonization and earn the public trust critical to long-term success.

This modern approach is **truly transformational**. It requires executive commitment, cross-functional collaboration and investment in new capabilities. But the payoff is enormous. Utilities that embrace it will emerge stronger and better positioned to serve customers in the energy future, create substantial operational efficiencies and deliver better business outcomes along the way.

Incremental Decision Logic

- x Department-level planning
- x Deterministic peak assumptions
- x Asset-by-asset justification
- x Program-specific customer engagement

Result

- x Overbuilt capacity
- x Rising costs
- x Slow progress despite investment

Integrated Systems Planning

- ✓ Cross-system planning
- ✓ Probabilistic scenarios
- ✓ Lifecycle-informed investment
- ✓ Customers treated as system participants

Result

- ✓ Capital efficiency
- ✓ Resilience under uncertainty
- ✓ Regulatory credibility



1. Plan with Systems Thinking and Probabilistic Modeling

Why it Matters

Traditional deterministic planning no longer works for a grid shaped by rapid load growth, distributed resources and climate volatility. Today's environment demands systems-based planning that treats generation, transmission and distribution as an integrated whole rather than isolated silos. This enables utilities to see how one investment decision affects risks and opportunities across the entire system.

At the same time, probabilistic and scenario-based modeling is essential for understanding uncertainty around demand, extreme weather, and asset performance. Instead of designing solely for worst-case peaks, planners can explore multiple futures, quantify risk, and prioritize investments that perform well under a range of conditions. This strengthens resilience and reduces stranded-asset risk. It also supports more strategic conversations with regulators and stakeholders, aligning investment plans with policy goals, community expectations and the realities of a highly dynamic energy landscape.

Plan with Systems Thinking and Probabilistic Modeling:

What to Do

Transformational planning starts with seeing the grid as a single, integrated system under once-in-a-generation strain from aging assets, extreme weather, and explosive load growth. Utility leaders need practical steps that move them from isolated, deterministic peak studies to probabilistic, scenario-based planning. The actions below operationalize that shift, enabling teams to align their assumptions, models, and investments around shared outcomes.

- **Conduct an integrated system inventory across transmission, distribution and DER assets**
- **Employ probabilistic forecasting and scenario modeling for demand, weather impacts and generation variability**
- **Initiate regular cross-functional workshops**
 - Include engineering, operations, and data ownership teams
 - Align on the shared data model and assumptions that tie the model together
- **Establish metrics for planning flexibility, predictive accuracy and improvements in resiliency**
- **Conduct regular reviews to compare scenario outcomes with performance data**
 - Refine models iteratively
- **Regularly communicate findings and model assumptions to regulators and internal stakeholders to build credibility**
- **Invest in the short-term and long-term digital infrastructure needed to support integrated planning**
 - Include system modeling, data management and scenario/version management



2. Integrate Lifecycle-Cost and 8760 Analysis

Why it Matters

Lifecycle cost and 8760 analysis provide a more accurate view of value creation in a grid that is changing faster than ever. Traditional planning often focuses on first costs or limited time horizons, leading to investments that appear cost-effective upfront but underperform over their useful life. By contrast, lifecycle analysis evaluates capital, operations, maintenance, replacement, and decommissioning costs across decades, capturing the complete economic profile of assets.

When paired with 8760 (hourly) analysis, utilities gain insight into how assets perform in real operating conditions, across seasons, market prices, and evolving load shapes. This is especially critical for emerging loads, such as data centers and electrification, as well as flexible resources such as storage and demand response. Together, these methods reveal hidden constraints, identify underutilized capacity, and highlight opportunities to avoid or defer traditional infrastructure. The result is smarter, more defensible investment decisions that enhance reliability, affordability, and long-term system flexibility.

Integrate Lifecycle-Cost and 8760 Analysis

What to Do

Utilities can no longer justify investments on first cost or simple payback when customers face rising bills and regulators demand proof of long-term value. Lifecycle-cost and 8760 analyses provide the framework for comparing options over decades under real operating conditions and across risk scenarios. The steps below translate that discipline into concrete modeling, planning, and feedback practices.

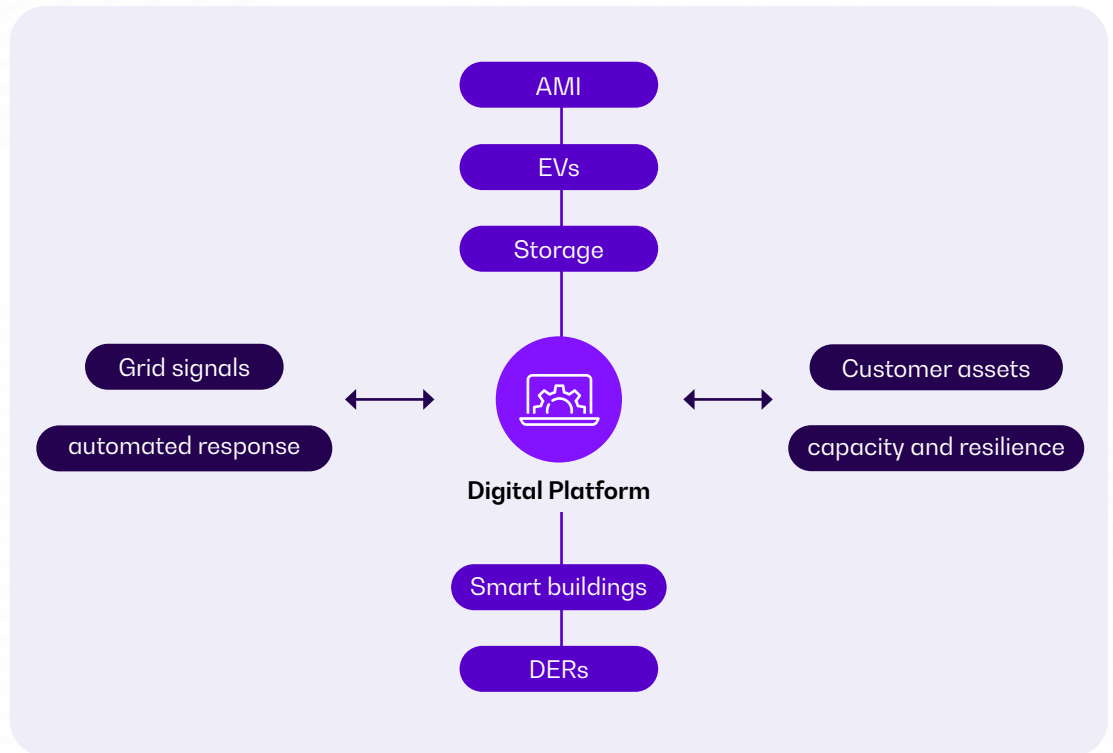
- **Develop lifecycle-cost models spanning 20–60 years for each asset class**
 - Incorporating maintenance, climate, and technology risk factors
 - Include the value of asset flexibility in the cost/benefit models
- **Implement 8760 (hourly) system-wide analysis**
 - Use to identify congestion points and underutilized infrastructure
- **Integrate lifecycle analysis with capital planning tools**
 - Use to prioritize investments yielding optimal long-term value.
- **Develop system-wide lifecycle cost models that can evaluate the cost of performance**
 - Cover multiple scenarios, with clusters of incremental investments
- **Simulate operational outcomes under extreme weather, cyber events, and demand surges to identify cost-risk thresholds.**
- **Evaluate deferred capital benefits from non-wires alternatives**
 - Include DER and energy storage in 8760 load-flow models
- **Incorporate environmental, social and governance (ESG) and economic metrics**
 - Integrate to assess sustainability performance
- **Establish feedback loops between operational data and long-term cost models**

3. Modernize Through Digital Customer Engagement

Why it Matters

Utilities must reimagine customer relationships by building digital platforms that turn ratepayers into active participants in grid reliability. This change is critical as consumers possess increasing amounts of flexible energy resources, as well as generation resources. Empowering customers with digital capabilities to activate these resources as “grid assets” provides a critical path to improving grid efficiency. Current technologies enable consumers to “configure” these assets and then operate them autonomously with grid providers, in stark contrast to conventional demand management programs.

The expectation of digital engagement is also increasingly a “table stakes” requirement for most consumers who interact with many other firms that behave in this way. These include real-time outage communication, usage analytics, and personalized savings programs powered by advanced metering and data visualization. Transparent digital engagement fosters customer trust, increases participation in demand response programs, and enhances resilience through shared accountability.



Modernize Through Digital Customer Engagement

What to Do

Digital engagement is where abstract grid plans meet customer reality. As expectations rise and outages or peak events increasingly threaten business continuity, utilities must give customers intuitive tools to see, understand, and flex their usage. The actions that follow focus on launching platforms, analytics, and communications that turn customers and their behind-the-meter assets into dependable, automated grid partners.

- Launch customer-facing digital platforms that offer real-time outage, energy use, and demand-response updates
- Use advanced metering and analytics to provide personalized consumption insights and adaptive rate suggestions
- Begin development of “technology-first” interaction models that favor the automatic operation of consumer DERs
- Develop multi-channel outreach (mobile apps, SMS, email, dashboards)
- Implement incentive structures that reward flexible consumption, including time-of-use and resiliency credits.
- Create two-way data sharing policies that ensure customer trust while enabling aggregated DER participation
- Measure engagement metrics (response rates, satisfaction, participation) to refine programs iteratively
- Partner with regulators to strengthen transparency and embed consumer protections into digital programs.

4. Drive Market Reform and Flexible Resource Optimization

Why it Matters

True grid transformation requires policy innovation that aligns regulatory frameworks with grid modernization goals. Typically, policies related to flexible resources are isolated from the core utility operation. Most programs align with seasonal volume or demand targets without considering the system's needs or plan. To truly capture the benefits of flexible resources, regulation needs to shift to incentivize both utilities and consumers to actively participate in energy markets continuously, rather than only by exception. We need to treat consumer assets as we would conventional grid investments. Consumers need to be rewarded differently to make this a reality.

Utilities should pursue reforms such as **tariff modernization, transparent interconnection workflows, and developer partnerships** that enable the integration of distributed energy resources (DERs), storage, and non-wires alternatives, as well as incentive models that align utilities, customers, and stakeholders to improve outcomes. This creates new revenue streams and optimizes investments for cost-effectiveness and flexibility.

What to Do

Even the best planning and customer programs will underperform if markets send the wrong price signals. Today, capacity constructs and tariffs often fail to account for the unique scale and flexibility of new loads, such as data centers and distributed resources. The steps below focus on redesigning tariffs, processes, and transparency to ensure flexible assets are valued appropriately and capital is directed to where it delivers the greatest system benefit.

- Redesign tariff structures to reward customer and developer flexibility through performance-based incentives
- Digitize interconnection processes to improve transparency and speed for distributed generation and storage applications
- Develop an evaluation framework for non-wires alternatives that quantifies avoided infrastructure costs.
- Establish public dashboards showing available feeder capacity and DER hosting limits to inform third-party innovation
- Facilitate stakeholder workshops with regulators, developers and community representatives to align market reforms
- Leverage analytic modeling to assess how reform scenarios influence grid balance and investment
- Pilot flexible resource optimization zones that test tariff redesign and demand-side aggregation strategies



5. Embed Cybersecurity and Digital Resilience in Every Layer

Why it Matters

As utilities digitize operations, cybersecurity and digital resilience become foundational to safety and reliability, as well as ensuring public trust. Expanding networks of sensors, smart devices and automation systems multiply the number of potential entry points for malicious actors. At the same time, critical grid functions increasingly depend on digital platforms for monitoring, control, and coordination. A single compromise can cascade rapidly across systems, affecting physical assets, customer services, and market operations. Embedding cybersecurity at every layer—from field devices and communications to control centers and cloud platforms—reduces this risk.

Effective programs combine robust architecture, zero-trust principles, incident response readiness, and continuous monitoring with employee training and governance. Cyber risk modeling integrated into planning and operations helps utilities prioritize investments and understand the resilience benefits of different architectures. Methods include developing scalable control frameworks, integrated digital risk modeling, and routine cyber scenario simulations. Treating cybersecurity as a strategic, ongoing practice safeguards modernization efforts and ensures the success of digital transformation.

Embed Cybersecurity and Digital Resilience in Every Layer

What to Do

As utilities digitize planning, operations, and customer programs, cyber risk becomes inseparable from reliability risk. Highly distributed, third-party-controlled resources introduce new attack surfaces that traditional compliance frameworks do not fully cover. The actions that follow outline how to embed security by design, modern control architectures, testing, and governance so that every digital advancement strengthens, rather than jeopardizes, grid resilience.

- Apply “security by design” principles to all new technologies, communications and planning workflows.
- Use cyber scenario modeling and drilling to simulate incidents and recovery times
- Create federated digital-risk registers to centralize monitoring of infrastructure, operations, and vendor exposure.
- Implement decentralized control frameworks that ensure failover redundancy and resilience against network disruption.
- Conduct quarterly penetration testing on SCADA, IoT, and AMI networks to validate mitigation controls.
- Establish governance procedures that integrate cyber metrics into system reliability and compliance reporting.
- Train operational staff and executives in cyber-aware decision making through continuous learning programs.
- Seek to push security maturity beyond compliance-mandated minimums
- Regularly benchmark with established frameworks



6. Foster Continuous Improvement and Agile Adaptation

Why it Matters

To handle evolving policy, climate, and market dynamics, utilities should adopt agile, iterative improvement cycles aligned with DevOps principles. Most conventional technology and process investments are still “waterfall,” which require long development cycles before products are released, often years. This cycle of development fails to align with the rapidly evolving state of the grid.

As technology migrates to the cloud, it often enables shorter cycles and rapid iteration. This transition allows utilities to “fail fast,” a critical element of matching the pace of change. Teams can test new capabilities on a limited scale, learn from real performance, and scale only the solutions that deliver measurable value. These enable real-time feedback integration, continuous optimization of system performance, and faster adaptation to emerging technologies and customer needs. This ensures that grid transformation remains dynamic, forward-looking, and resilient amid constant disruption.

Foster Continuous Improvement and Agile Adaptation

What to Do

Grid conditions, technologies, and policies are changing too quickly for long, linear project cycles. Utilities need operating models that let teams test ideas in the field, learn from real performance, and then scale only what works—without losing sight of reliability or cost. The practices below bring agile, DevOps-inspired ways of working into planning, operations, and governance.

Communication





7. Empower Stakeholders Through Transparency and Collaboration

Why it Matters

Effective transformation requires cross-functional alignment that breaks down longstanding silos inside utilities. Traditional utilities often maintain planning processes separate from customer-facing services, which fragments decision-making and slows progress. This structural separation creates internal friction and weakens incentives to explore innovative, cross-functional solutions to grid challenges. Utilities must realign organizational structures toward cross-functional teams that align on shared, customer-facing outcomes. By doing so, they can also redesign incentive structures so that planners, engineers, and program managers all succeed when customers and communities see clear benefits.

To achieve this shift, utilities should combine engineering, operations, regulatory and customer engagement teams under shared metrics for reliability, affordability, sustainability, and equity. Transparent communication, ongoing stakeholder training, and joint scenario planning promote buy-in among policymakers, system operators, and customers. It creates a common understanding of tradeoffs and opportunities. In addition, collaboration ensures that grid innovation advances in sync with community priorities, regulatory compliance and internal capabilities.

What to Do

True transformation requires more than good analytics; it demands shared understanding and joint ownership of tradeoffs. Regulators, community leaders, system operators, customer programs, and developers all experience grid strain differently, yet depend on the same investments and policies. The actions that follow focus on structures, data, and communication channels that keep stakeholders aligned on goals, progress, and next steps.

- Form multi-departmental transformation councils aligning utility, regulatory, and customer priorities.
- Develop stakeholder maps to identify internal and external collaborators, champions, and subject-matter experts.
- Build shared data platforms that allow real-time visibility into project progress and system performance.
- Publish transformation dashboards showing KPIs
 - Integrate lessons learned into new iterations
 - Integrate lessons learned into new iterations
- Facilitate collaborative scenario workshops that integrate community feedback into planning assumptions
- Establish continuous training and communications programs
- Conduct post-implementation reviews to evaluate lessons learned

Why TRC?

Executing modern grid transformation at the scale and speed required by today's market dynamics demands the right high-tech expertise combined with deep industry knowledge. TRC stands ready to guide utilities on this digital journey, with highly skilled, experienced staff who understand both the technology and organizational needs to achieve success. More importantly, we deliver customized solutions tailored to your individual needs.

Unmatched Depth of Resources and Experience

TRC brings thousands of energy professionals and distribution engineers together to form the most extensive integrated digital deployment capability in North America. Our multidisciplinary teams combine systems engineering, strategic consulting, market design, data analytics and digital solutions expertise in coordinated project workflows. This breadth and depth allow integrated planning across generation, transmission and distribution while maintaining meticulous attention to detail, regulatory alignment, and stakeholder confidence.



Proven Planning and Modeling Capabilities

TRC develops utility-side and customer-facing lifecycle scenario models that reflect the real-world complexity of the grid. Our practitioners apply 8760 analysis, probabilistic forecasting, and advanced asset-optimization frameworks that scale from single feeders to entire balancing authorities. We have delivered hundreds of integrated resource plans, distribution system plans, and operational optimization studies that blend technical rigor with strategic clarity and executable roadmaps.

Integrated Solutions Across Strategy, Market Design, and Operations

TRC advises on incentive reform, tariff design, and developer engagement strategies that unlock new sources of value for utilities and customers. Our teams design and implement customer programs, grid analytics platforms, and digital engagement solutions that enable real-time alerts, visibility into savings, and intuitive participation in demand response and flexible load programs. We support utilities from concept and business case through implementation, change management, and post-deployment performance improvement.

Commitment to Agile Delivery and Continuous Innovation

TRC employs agile principles to help utilities respond quickly to changing policy, technology and market conditions. Our teams have successfully supported non-wires solutions, modernized the DER interconnection process, and led complex multi-stakeholder planning efforts while maintaining schedule and budget discipline. Strong partnerships with leading software, data and service providers enable innovative architectures and reliable, secure deployments that deliver measurable improvements in reliability, resilience, and customer value.

Every Transformation Begins with a First Step

Utilities that lead the next era of grid transformation will move beyond incremental improvement toward bold, integrated action. By adopting probabilistic scenario planning, lifecycle-cost modeling, digital customer engagement, market reform, embedded cybersecurity, agile adaptation and cross-functional collaboration, utilities can achieve true grid modernization.

The technical capabilities exist today. The regulatory pathways are opening. Customer expectations are clear. The competitive and climate imperatives are urgent. What separates successful transformation from stalled initiatives is organizational resolve, strategic clarity and expert partnership.

TRC is ready to partner with your utility to execute this transformation. We bring specialized expertise, proven methodologies, deep industry experience and genuine commitment to your success. Whether you are at the early stages of strategic visioning or executing large-scale transformation programs, TRC can help.

TRC stands for adaptability. With direction setting perspectives and partnerships, our 8,000+ tested practitioners in advisory, consulting, construction, engineering and management services deliver unique resolutions that answer any built or natural imperative. By creating new pathways for the world to thrive, we help our clients adapt to change and achieve long-lasting results while solving the challenges of making the Earth a better place to live — community by community and project by project.



[Contact us today](#) to learn more about how we can help!

