

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AFTER THE PANDEMIC

Building an Equitable Clean Energy Workforce

We have long known that the demographics of our energy efficiency workforce is not representative of the public it serves. ‘The Great Pause’ has created a much-needed opportunity for industry and workforce introspection.¹ As our clean energy industry recovers from the pandemic, we have an opportunity to re-envision our workforce to better address structural and historic inequities in access, wealth, and opportunity. *But how do we ensure that the green recovery is accessible to a broader swath of the U.S. population?*

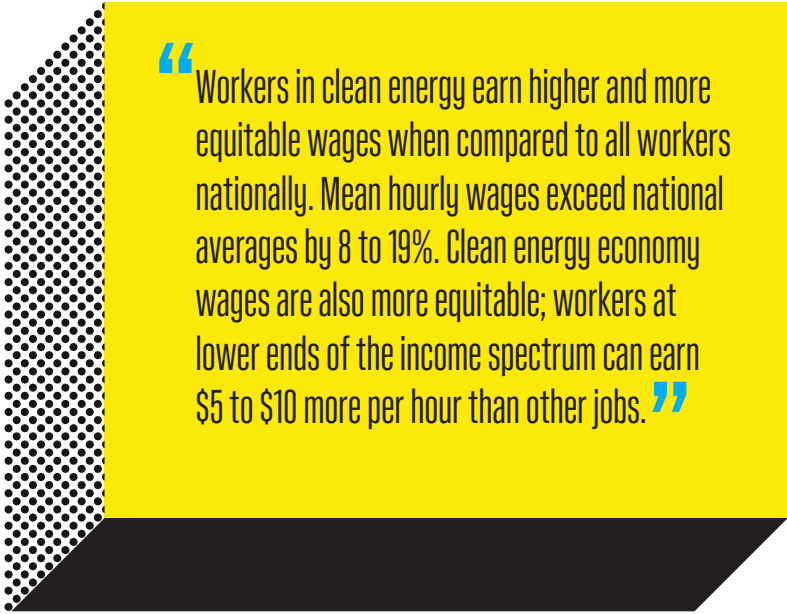
State of the Trades: Demographic Disparities in Energy Careers

Installing Energy Efficiency (EE) upgrades is a critical piece of the clean energy puzzle. Given the sizeable workforce that is needed to carry out this transition, it stands to reason that an abundance of higher paying clean energy jobs will attract an abundance of diverse workers.

But according to a 2019 Brookings Institute analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) occupational employment numbers, the demographics of the clean energy and energy efficiency workforce do not bear this out. Only 3.7% of insulation workers were women and only 5.9% were Black or African American. For context, women made up 47% of the national workforce while Black and African American workers made up 12.3% of the workforce.²

Except for an overrepresentation of Latino workers in the insulation trade (43.3% compared to 17.6% of the national workforce), our industry is not inclusive in the trades. We are also missing opportunities in the ranks of environmental scientists and geoscientists where women (33%), Black and African American (4.8%), and Hispanic or Latino workers (12.4%) remain underrepresented.³

Brookings’ research shows that many occupations within the clean energy economy are higher paying despite having lower educational requirements.⁴ But our industry should be careful relying on the low educational requirement of clean energy jobs as a substitute for doing the intentional work of reaching out to communities to ensure a diverse workforce.⁵



“Workers in clean energy earn higher and more equitable wages when compared to all workers nationally. Mean hourly wages exceed national averages by 8 to 19%. Clean energy economy wages are also more equitable; workers at lower ends of the income spectrum can earn \$5 to \$10 more per hour than other jobs.”

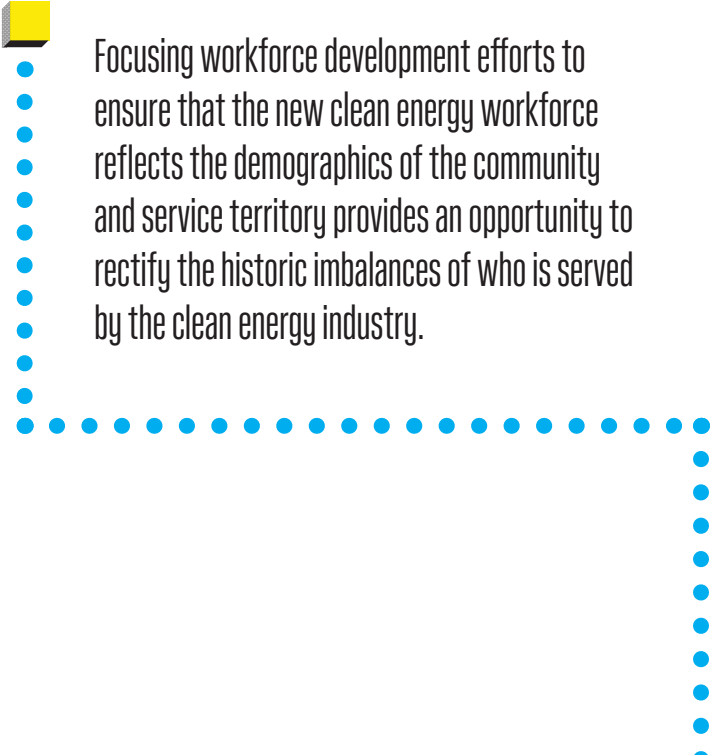
Redressing Historic Wrongs Through Workforce Development

As an industry, we are at an inflection point to redistribute the benefits of clean energy and energy efficiency jobs more equitably across the labor force. Clean energy jobs tend to pay better than average employment and many jobs have lower barriers to entry than jobs with comparable salaries.

ILLUME is supporting a resilient community pilot in a historically underserved community. When we asked community members to share their concerns, *workforce development and economic development* were at the top of their list—not smart grid infrastructure or energy efficiency.

In addition to creating jobs in underserved communities, workforce development efforts may help to increase program participation. In a 2019 study of nonparticipants across Massachusetts energy efficiency programs, ILLUME found that nonparticipants were more likely than participants to live in rental units, have a high school education or no secondary school degree, be low-to moderate income, and speak a language other than English at home. Investing in workforce development to train contractors can provide jobs for the community and make it easier for people in the community to access programs.

Developing a more diverse energy efficiency workforce could also enable more people to participate in programs, as implementation team and contractors are able to (literally) speak their language and reflect their community. Our research also finds that there are often barriers to participate in programs related to language, culture, and access.



Focusing workforce development efforts to ensure that the new clean energy workforce reflects the demographics of the community and service territory provides an opportunity to rectify the historic imbalances of who is served by the clean energy industry.



As utilities consider investing in workforce development efforts, our team has the following recommendations:



Identify the gaps in your existing workforce:

What does the current EE workforce look like in your area and how does that differ from the broader workforce? Are there communities that are under-represented? Are there communities that don't participate in programs? How might you better serve those communities through expanding your trade ally networks?



Create a training structure and support:

For trade allies, especially for minority, women, and disabled veteran-owned business enterprises (MWDVBEs), providing specific training, mentorship, and other support can help people begin work in a new trade or position. As part of our contractor research for an evaluation of a workforce development program, our interviews highlighted the importance of informal mentorships (of being 'taken under the wing' of a more established contractor). While valuable, these informal mentorships may perpetuate a workforce with similar demographic makeup as the current workforce. Creating structured programs and explicit mentorships and opportunities for learning and training can expand these 'informal' knowledge sharing opportunities. We highlight ComEd's Diverse EE Supplier program as an example of a program focused on developing MWDVBE trade allies (see sidebar).



Build community relationships:

Building relationships in a community takes time and repeated engagements. Especially for communities that have been underserved, there may be skepticism that the utility outreach is real and/or that the investment is not a one-off. Gaining trust will take time and consistent effort. Similarly, building a workforce, especially expanding a workforce to include those historically marginalized, requires an investment of time and money. If utilities want to transform their workforce, they will need to commit the time and money to doing it well.



Focus on youth initiatives:

Several successful workforce development programs like SoCalREN's ACES Pathway program (see sidebar) target young people in high school to provide the training needed for a clean energy career and cultivate interest in clean energy jobs.



Work with commissions:

Utilities working to expand their workforce may want to consider working with commissions and partnering with other stakeholders to defray the cost of investments in training. This also ensures greater buy-in for workforce development efforts.

SAMPLE PROGRAMS

Incubating Entrepreneurs: ComEd's Diverse Energy Efficiency Service Provider (EESP) Incubator Program

ComEd's Diverse Energy Efficiency Service Provider (EESP) Incubator Program links community-based workforce development and trade organizations to increase access to energy efficiency jobs and projects for minority, women and disabled veteran-owned business enterprises (MWDVBE) in its service territory (ACEEE 2020). The program provides a range of support to contractors including training contractors on ComEd's Energy Efficiency Portfolio offerings, back-office training and support, and assistance on certifications and project financing applications. More broadly, program services help contractors identify, address, and resolve barriers to building a successful business in the energy efficiency industry. The program's goal is to enable diverse contractors to join the EESP Network and complete energy efficiency projects. Once ComEd accepts cohort members into its EESP Network, outreach specialists work with the utility's implementing contractors to help cohort members obtain marketing materials and correctly submit project application materials.

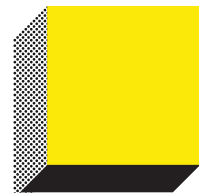
ComEd has accepted eight cohort members into its EESP Network and three have submitted energy efficiency projects or fulfilled product orders for the portfolio. ComEd is also fostering a mentorship relationship between current EESPs and cohort members. It will continue to support cohort members' business growth plans by offering additional training through its CONSTRUCT Program, which trains individual workers to apply for entry-level positions in the construction industry.

Investing in Youth: SoCalREN ACES Pathway

Architecture, Construction, and Engineering Students (ACES) Pathway Program

Sponsored by Southern California Regional Energy Network (SoCalREN), the ACES program encourages high school students to explore careers in science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics. Participants co-enroll in community college courses. The credits they earn are transferable to campuses within the California State University and University of California systems, helping to remove barriers to higher education. In addition, ACES offers students paid summer internships. The program further addresses financial barriers to higher education and job training by providing students with related necessities, from proper work gear to various training and enrollment fees.

Currently, six high schools participate in ACES, with nearly 400 students enrolled in the program.



1. Bruno Maçães, "The Great Pause Was an Economic Revolution," Foreign Policy, 2021. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/06/22/the-great-pause-was-an-economic-revolution%E2%80%A8/>.

2. Mark Muro, Adie Tomer, Ranjitha Shivaram and Joseph Kane, "Advancing inclusion through clean energy jobs," Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program, April 2019. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/2019.04_metro_Clean-Energy-Jobs_Report_Muro-Tomer-Shivaram-Kane.pdf.

3. "Clean Jobs America 2021," E2, 2021. <https://e2.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/E2-2021-Clean-Jobs-America-Report-04-19-2021.pdf>.