

GREEN PATHWAYS OUT OF POVERTY: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES



Photo courtesy of American YouthWorks, Austin, TX

Green Pathways Out of Poverty: Workforce Development Initiatives Community of Practice

The emergence of a new green economy presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to connect low-income people to jobs and careers in what will be a key economic sector just as it starts to grow. The authors of this document represent a diverse group of training providers working to make this happen by sharing knowledge and best practices in the field.

Workforce development practitioners face a set of common questions about services, partnerships, curriculum, certifications, links to employers, funding and measuring their results. On March 30 and 31, 2009, Green For All convened a working group of practitioners focused on providing *green pathways out of poverty* to start developing shared answers to these shared questions. Participants spent the two days connecting with each other, sharing expertise, and collaborating in order to produce new knowledge that will advance the field. This group began to identify the best practices and resources that make effective workforce development projects in green jobs. By the end of the two-day meeting, it had identified five keys to success for green workforce development. These keys, when combined with effective leadership and staff, help these programs serve the workers the programs train, the businesses and industry they support, and the environment they aim to protect.

This document is a product of that two-day meeting and links to resources recommended by Community of Practice members. It is meant to guide and support anyone seeking to create pathways out of poverty through green job training.

Many thanks to the [Green Pathways Out of Poverty Working](#) for creating this report and sharing their wisdom and expertise in this important work.

Every program or organization engaged in sector-based workforce development serves two clients: the workers it trains, and the industry it aims to place those workers in (in this case, green/environmental businesses). To serve both clients well, a program needs a foundation in the industry it is targeting and deeply rooted knowledge of the population it seeks to serve. That means developing competencies in the following five areas:

1. knowing the services, resources and advocacy needed for its target population;
2. building strong relationships with the industry and its representatives in order to help the industry grow and connect graduates to good jobs;
3. providing education, skills and industry certifications to bring its target population to the industry employment opportunities;
4. meaningfully measuring and reporting success; and
5. diversifying its funding.

Workforce development programs should determine both where they are strong and where they need to improve vis-à-vis these five areas. This evaluation must be based on the need to serve both the target population of worker/trainees and the target industry. This document outlines some key ways that these agencies can achieve success in each area.

I. UNDERSTANDING THE TARGET POPULATIONS AND REMOVING THE BARRIERS TO THEIR SUCCESS

The first step for workforce development programs is to understand the populations they are serving, from high school students to immigrants who speak little English, to the formerly incarcerated. The number of distinct populations a program is trying to serve may be very large, and the challenges or barriers to success can be different or similar for each. Workers with criminal records need certain services and support to re-enter the workforce and return to society in general. Similarly, industry may need some support in setting these workers up for success. Good programs meet the needs of both the workers and the industry with appropriate services, support and training.

It is important not to underestimate the level of support some people may require — or to lose sight of the fact that funding is always inadequate to meet the need. Workers from disadvantaged backgrounds constantly encounter barriers to success. Being able to offer appropriate support services from recruitment to retention will help certain populations to be successful in the long term.

To meet these needs, workforce development programs must understand the barriers and challenges their target populations face. They must ensure that they have the skills, staff and resources to help them manage those hurdles.

This will be easier for programs that are connected to the larger system of social services, supports and advocacy that their target population use. A good workforce development program will know what resources are available for its target population. It will be a part of the support network advocating for their rights, and it will understand the intricacies of services, strategies and funding tailored to that population. By connecting and leveraging these different systems, programs can alleviate any barriers your target population may face.

[Resources for Barrier Removal](http://www.greenforall.org/what-we-do/building-a-movement/community-of-practice/green-training-resources)

<http://www.greenforall.org/what-we-do/building-a-movement/community-of-practice/green-training-resources>

II. CONNECTING GRADUATES TO JOBS

Job training does workers no good if they cannot get the jobs they have trained for. To help graduates land these jobs, workforce development programs must develop strong relationships with key stakeholders. They must cultivate both industry partners and labor partners. And venturing into social entrepreneurship themselves allows workforce development programs to hire their own graduates.

Industry Partners

A good, healthy and strong sector-based workforce development program is linked to the industry sector. The best programs build capacity to serve the industry as well as the workers. They see themselves as an industry intermediary who can play a broker role for both clients: the industry employers and the job seekers. They are providing a service to industry, not asking for charity or favors.

These programs must always be aware of what employers can and cannot do. Employers *can* define what they need in terms of their workforce, but generally, they *cannot* change their requirements for the job seekers who walk in. The intermediary needs to recruit and prepare the job seekers who are right for these jobs. This is an interactive process that should always evolve. Many agencies engage employers through an advisory board or a business association to keep this dialogue open and active.

Traditional labor-market research tells workforce development programs what jobs are available in their regions. But this research does not translate easily into data about "green" jobs, because these jobs are still being defined. Are they new jobs, or old jobs done differently? Does a receptionist in a renewable energy company count since answering phones is not a green skill? Many green job training programs are struggling with their local workforce investment agencies to articulate the anticipated needs within this burgeoning new labor market, and to build responsive programming to new market conditions.

Labor Partners



BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE GREEN ECONOMY STRONG ENOUGH TO LIFT PEOPLE OUT OF POVERTY

Many of the green jobs we seek are in construction and in many regions, much of this work is unionized. When working with the unionized sector, workforce development programs must understand that the employers and the unions have already established a relationship through the collective bargaining process. They also come together to discuss shared hiring and training needs. Unions and their employer associations can provide real time information as to what the industry needs in terms of hiring standards and workforce skills. By working with unions in the sector, workforce development programs can build the relationships that allow them to connect job seekers with good jobs.

Green job training programs should be an ally to unions in seeking to expand not only union membership, but the number of union jobs. Unions are not interested in building membership if their limited share of the labor market means they cannot offer new members employment. Likewise, unemployed workers have little incentive to join the union if it doesn't translate into work. Workforce development programs can partner with labor to advocate for [Project Labor Agreements](#) and [Community Benefit Agreements](#) that guarantee pre-negotiated standards such as local hiring and living wages. By advocating for more good union jobs, workforce development agencies can make strong allies out of organized labor.

Unions may not do the actual hiring, but they understand the hiring needs, the hiring standards, and the acceptance standards. And, when unions manage apprenticeship programs, they may have a stronger hand in hiring itself. Acting as the apprenticeship sponsor, the union can often inform and help determine who gets accepted and when. Public policy can expand the market share of the union work, creating more union opportunities. Project Labor Agreements and Community Benefits Agreements often work to assure that projects go union and people from the community can have access to some of the openings created. Still, the standards for employment remain intact and the workforce skills remain crucial. Intermediaries can train and prepare individuals from the region for these new opportunities.

Many unions act as the sponsor for their joint labor-management registered apprenticeship programs. [Apprenticeships](#) are federally approved training and credentialing programs sponsored by individual employers, employer associations or jointly by unions and management. Apprentices work full-time with their employer, gaining on-the-job training to go with concurrent classroom instruction. provided by a joint union-management training program, community colleges or private for-profit schools. While apprenticeship programs cover a wide range of industries and occupations, the majority of registered apprenticeships are in construction and technical fields. Several of the most popular apprenticeship occupations, such as electricians, carpenters and plumbers are likely to overlap with or merge into a future green job category.

Making sure the jobs are good jobs is another part of advocacy and brokering that allows workforce intermediaries to function in a unique fashion. Partnerships for advocacy for good jobs are often found in the labor movement and where social justice advocates reside. Training programs should identify the players for worker rights in their area, using the following list of questions as a guide, and build the relationships with these players.

- Who is looking out for fair wages and safe working conditions?
- What is the union movement's density in the region?
- What industries are organized?
- Who are the labor leaders?
- What populations make up the workforce? What organizations advocate for their rights?
- Who is talking about equitable development?

Social Entrepreneurship

Recently more non-profits are engaging in social entrepreneurship—organizing and operating a business venture to serve a social purpose. When an organization builds a business paired with its green job training program it can put at least some of their graduates into jobs immediately, starting them on the path to successful careers. This approach is becoming increasingly common in the field.

For example, Rubicon National Social Innovations supported Goodwill Silicon Valley to pilot a mattress recycling facility in San Jose that employs homeless veterans to deconstruct mattresses so that their components can be sold to recyclables markets. The facility diverts up to 88% of each mattress it receives from entering landfills and provides up to a year of employment coupled with supportive services to its employees, working to ensure that by the completion of the year, its employees have achieved the personal stability and the job experience to market themselves in the private sector.

Programs looking to build this kind of social enterprise must grapple not only with the challenges of other workforce development agencies, but also with those of a small business. They need to dedicate resources to laying a foundation and marketing the enterprise's products or services in order to build a strong business, make sure their workers are trained and can perform the tasks well, and assure that they earn decent wages and are given adequate levels of supportive services. At every juncture, these demands will compete with one another. Having principles and operations to match will help the company to remain true to its combined mission.

[Resources for Connecting Graduates to Jobs](http://www.greenforall.org/what-we-do/building-a-movement/community-of-practice/green-training-resources)

<http://www.greenforall.org/what-we-do/building-a-movement/community-of-practice/green-training-resources>

III. EDUCATION, SKILLS & INDUSTRY CERTIFICATIONS

Of course, workforce development programs must effectively prepare workers for jobs and careers in the industry. They must educate, train and certify workers so that they have the tools they need to succeed.

Job Readiness Education

Every workforce development project must include a job readiness component that trains and coaches job seekers on just what is expected of them as workers. Basic adult education in academic skills is also crucial. ESL classes can help immigrants with limited proficiency in English prepare for the job market.

Many employers require workers to have a high school diploma or pass an equivalency test. Workforce development programs with strong ties to high school equivalency programs can do a lot to help their trainees become job-ready. The introductory skills in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) are critical for this green industry. In some cases, students in equivalency programs are even learning about sustainability, energy, building science and climate change. For those workers who may consider advancing in the field, college preparation is advisable.

Not every trainee will take advantage of every available resource, but leveraging partnerships with agencies, schools or colleges will allow job seekers to seek not only an entry-level job but a range of advancement opportunities.

Vocational Training

Vocational skills are those that are more closely tied with the needs of the partnering employer pool. Workforce development programs must understand what skills these employers look for and what credentials are standard for entry-level jobs and for advancement in the field.

Basic tool usage, reading a tape measure (and its related math) and basic blueprint reading are foundational vocational skills in green industry. Health and safety training and environmental literacy are also key for workers in these fields. Some apprenticeship programs have entry exams with math and mechanical reasoning questions. And in the future, we will be repairing more and discarding less. To meet these evolving needs, workers need to understand how things work and how they are made. In each of these cases, training workers and providing practice tests can prepare them for success.

Curriculum and Certifications

Curriculum depends a great deal on the teachers delivering it. Some great instructors have no documented curriculum to share, while some great material in the wrong hands can be largely useless. Equipping good teachers with good material is critical. Whatever training a program delivers, soliciting input from industry stakeholders will make it as useful as possible for its trainees.

Industry certifications vary widely. In many cases, they are still being developed and standardized. Staying in touch with your region's employers will keep you up-to-date on relevant certification requirements. In doing so, it is important to be aware of the different requirements for *entry* and for *advancement*. For instance, offering and requiring training and certification in areas that also require experience can backfire if the target population lacks experience, you risk setting the bar too high. Programs should consider entry-level and advancement certifications differently and plan accordingly.

[Resources for Education, Curriculum and Certifications](http://www.greenforall.org/what-we-do/building-a-movement/community-of-practice/green-training-resources)

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IV. MEANINGFULLY MEASURING AND REPORTING SUCCESS

Doing good work is not enough. We must also be able to tell others about the good work we do in quantifiable terms. This may seem like drudgery to some, but it can expose very exciting results. Measuring outcomes allows programs to claim their successes — and back those claims up. The first thing programs must do while designing, redesigning or improving is to *determine what matters*. Once they know what to measure, they can start collecting data.

Many times, funders help determine what matters. They ask for outcome projections and want grantees to report to them on a regular basis. Typical desired outcomes in green workforce development might be:

- How many trainees did the program recruit?
- From what populations?
- What services did the program deliver and to how many people?
- How deep are the services? What are the benchmarks?
- How many workers enrolled, completed, attained certifications, and/or advanced a level?
- How many trainees did the program successfully place in jobs? How many of those workers retained those jobs?
- How many workers earned wage increases?
- How much reduction in CO₂ emissions were program-trained workers responsible for?
- How many measures in energy efficiency did program-trained workers install?

- How many tons of reduction in waste were program-trained workers responsible for?
- How many gallons of water did program-trained workers help conserve?

A program must quantify the things that it values for its work- both in job development and for clean energy. These are the two keys to meaningfully and effectively measuring a green program's work. Some measures may seem tangential to the program's mission, but in fact have an outsized impact on success. For instance, trainees who secure childcare assistance or obtain a driver's license improve their chances of getting and keeping work. Some funders can help programs expand their reporting horizons. Funders will listen if a program offers measures of success that are broader than what the funders typically look for. The broader the story can be told, the more significance the program has.

[Resources for Measuring and Reporting Success](http://www.greenforall.org/what-we-do/building-a-movement/community-of-practice/green-training-resources)

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V. DIVERSIFYING FUNDING

Ultimately, no program can sustain itself — no matter how successful it is on the ground — without adequate financial resources. Securing these resources requires having a good program to offer to funders, documenting its success, and having relationships to potential funders. Private foundations and government funding are both pieces of the financial pie. Earned income from any social entrepreneurship endeavors can be added to that pie, but is not a panacea. Such endeavors have their own challenges and restrictions. Each organization and program must determine the right balance for itself. With a sincere movement towards sustainability by our government at the federal level, many of the federal grants will be tied to milestones that improve the environment and the jobs. To secure such funding, programs must be able to show people in every level of government that they are positioned to produce the desired outcomes.

Different agencies can fund different things and the most dynamic programs bring unique resources, allowing programs to blend separate funding sources and build out a comprehensive approach to workforce development for green jobs.

[Resources for Diversifying Funding](http://www.greenforall.org/what-we-do/building-a-movement/community-of-practice/green-training-resources)

<http://www.greenforall.org/what-we-do/building-a-movement/community-of-practice/green-training-resources>

The chart below lists the three aspects of any program that must inform its entirety. Program operators should identify their expertise and relationships and operate with those strengths. Likewise, they should examine these categories and see where they need to expand capabilities and affiliations. Having strong attributes in each category will allow programs to speak to a wide range of stakeholders and deliver broad impact.

Target Populations	Industry Stakeholders	Training/Education/Credentials
Immigrants	Labor Market Researchers	Life Skills
At-risk Youth	Employers/Contractors	Job readiness
Recent graduates	Business Development Services	Academic Skills
Women	Labor/Management Joint Funds	GED
Previously incarcerated	Unions	STEM
Long-term unemployed	Apprenticeship programs	College Prep
Veterans	Social Enterprises	Vocational Skills
Recently unemployed	Industry Associations	Mechanical reasoning
	Environmental Justice Orgs	Environmental Literacy
	Government Agencies	Occupational Health and Safety
		Building Science certifications
		Green certified skills

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