



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT FOR A CLEAN ENERGY FUTURE

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Where Do We Go From Here?

Across the country, communities are facing a convergence of rising energy bills, persistent environmental harm, and stagnant wages. While the transition to clean energy can help address many of these issues, it cannot succeed without a skilled, supported workforce to build and maintain it.

The primary bottleneck to achieving our climate and equity goals is not technology—it is labor. From residential heat pump installations to grid-scale modernization, demand for clean energy projects has outpaced the supply of qualified workers and capable local contractors. Without intentional action, this workforce gap will continue to slow deployment and limit the community benefits of the transition.

Meeting this moment requires more than the expansion of training programs. It demands a coordinated workforce ecosystem that aligns project demand, contractor capacity, and job quality. To deliver clean energy projects at the scale communities need, we must rapidly grow and diversify the workforce while ensuring these jobs are stable, well-paid, and accessible.

The Strategic Role of Community-Based Organizations

Community-based organizations (CBOs) are uniquely positioned to bridge the gap between policy goals and on-the-ground outcomes. Historically, many CBOs have focused on policy and advocacy, pushing for equitable climate and labor standards from outside the system. However, recent federal shifts, including changes under the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA), have narrowed the effectiveness of outside advocacy alone.

In this moment, some CBOs may find greater impact by expanding their role from advocate to operator. By helping to implement programs, negotiate project terms, or even develop clean energy assets directly, CBOs can move beyond demanding change to directly delivering it.

Playbook Overview

This playbook outlines five non-exclusive roles CBOs can play in the clean energy workforce ecosystem:

- **State Policy Advocate:** Advancing legislation and executive action that drive market demand, workforce investment, and “high-road labor” standards.
- **Policy Watchdog:** Monitoring implementation, defending workforce investments, and ensuring programs remain accountable to frontline communities.
- **Implementation Partner:** Operating workforce hubs, recruitment pipelines, navigator programs, and wraparound support systems.

- **Project Negotiator:** Securing Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs), Project Labor Agreements (PLAs), and workforce commitments tied to major projects.
- **Asset Developer:** Owning or co-developing clean energy infrastructure—such as community solar or thermal networks—to retain energy wealth locally.

Together, these roles represent a shift toward community control, economic resilience, and long-term energy sovereignty.

The Landscape: When Demand Meets the "Efficiency Mandate"

The expansion of CBO capacity is not happening in a vacuum. It is a response to a clean energy market that is accelerating unevenly—where project demand is rising faster than local workforce systems can support and where the benefits of investment are increasingly at risk of bypassing frontline communities.

To understand why CBO leadership is essential at this moment, we must examine the current clean energy landscape itself: what is driving demand, who controls project decisions, and where the workforce system is breaking down. The following section maps this terrain and explains why traditional workforce approaches are no longer sufficient.

The "What": A Perfect Storm of Demand

Four forces are currently accelerating the need for clean energy infrastructure:

- **The Data Center Surge:** The explosion of AI has made electricity the ultimate bottleneck.¹ Data centers are driving a massive need for increased energy supply and "behind-the-meter" renewables to keep the grid stable as centralized power prices rise.
- **Rising Centralized Energy Prices:** As global forces impact energy markets and the cost of maintaining an aging grid and meeting surging demand increases, utility rates are climbing.² Localized energy generation and efficiency upgrades are now an economic survival strategy for communities, not just an environmental choice.
- **The Post-OBBBA Race:** With the OBBBA altering the timeline for federal tax credits, developers are rushing to "safe harbor" projects and front-loading construction activity.

¹<https://www.csis.org/analysis/electricity-supply-bottleneck-us-ai-dominance>

²<https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/us-consumers-face-rising-electricity-prices-despite-clean-power-savings--reeii-2026-04-28/>

- **Electrification:** The shift away from fossil gas prioritizes electrification projects that require specialized technical expertise.

Together, these forces have created historic near-term demand for clean energy infrastructure, but much of this activity is concentrated in short-term or uneven project cycles rather than stable long-term market growth. As a result, workforce demand is rising rapidly, even while the broader development environment remains volatile.

The "Who": A Strained Workforce Ecosystem

Clean energy deployment depends on an interconnected ecosystem that is currently misaligned with community needs:

- **Developers:** Developers control project timelines, contractor selection, and labor standards. Many are increasingly prioritizing large utility-scale projects over distributed community-scale investments—often at the expense of local hiring and community benefits.³
- **Contractors:** There is a severe shortage of local HVAC, electrical, and mechanical firms capable of bidding on clean energy projects.^{4, 5} This “contractor bottleneck” limits the ability to keep work—and wages—local, even when community-minded developers are present.
- **The Trades:** Skilled workers are in such high demand that data centers, utilities, and clean energy projects are all competing for the same labor pool.^{6, 7} This reality creates an “efficiency mandate”: deliver more projects with fewer workers.

Recognizing that a strained ecosystem cannot be fixed by simply adding more workers to a broken pipeline, policy has shifted the market toward job quality.

The Shift: From Training in a Vacuum to Demand-Driven Quality

Historically, workforce programs focused on expanding supply—training workers first and hoping jobs would follow. This approach often produced “stranded credentials,” where graduates lacked access to real project experience and stable employment.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act attempted to solve this deficit by linking federal funding to Prevailing Wage and Registered

³<https://carsey.unh.edu/sites/default/files/media/2026-02/Resilient%20Communities%20and%20Affordable%20Energy-Charting%20Roles%20for%20Community%20Finance.pdf>

⁴<https://hvacrtrends.com/hvac-technician-shortage-2031/>

⁵<https://www.utilitydive.com/spons/how-the-us-solar-industry-can-solve-its-53k-worker-challenge/821681/>

⁶<https://www.forbes.com/sites/rpapier/2026/06/07/the-ai-boom-has-a-blue-collar-bottleneck/>

⁷<https://deloitte.wsj.com/riskandcompliance/in-ai-age-data-centers-power-companies-vie-for-skilled-workers-22d024dc>

Apprenticeship (PWA) requirements.⁸ By offering enhanced tax credits for projects meeting these standards, the federal government sought to standardize job quality across the sector.

However, job quality frameworks rely not just on project activity, but on sustained and predictable project pipelines. Many regions are still experiencing significant clean energy construction activity, but rising costs, policy uncertainty, compliance complexity, and reductions in state and federal incentives have weakened long-term market certainty in many areas.⁹ Without confidence that current demand will translate into durable market growth, contractors hesitate to expand capacity, and workers have little incentive to enter multiyear apprenticeships.

The CBO Opportunity: Reclaiming Momentum and Sovereignty

As federal demand signals weaken, leadership to advance clean energy is shifting back to states. State-level action offers a critical window for CBOs to secure durable labor standards, local hiring requirements, and community benefits through legislation and executive action.

State legislatures can facilitate community-benefiting projects by passing policies mandating or incentivizing Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) and Project Labor Agreements (PLAs) as a condition for state subsidies or permits. This strategy ensures that even in a slower market, the projects that proceed meet community priorities and high standards for job quality.

Additionally, in a market where traditional developers may be pivoting away from community-scale projects due to economic friction, CBOs have an opportunity to step in and fill the gap, especially with mechanisms like direct pay available for these types of projects. When CBOs move beyond a purely advocacy role into development or implementation, they shift the balance of power. Rather than requesting community-minded investment, CBOs can become community-minded investors that shape projects, labor standards, and ownership structures from the outset. This approach opens a path to true energy sovereignty: using localized generation and infrastructure to buffer communities from rising centralized energy costs and market volatility.

CBO staff are themselves part of the clean energy workforce: designing programs, negotiating agreements, managing projects, and translating policy into action. This document is intended as both a practical guide and a framework for helping CBOs build long-term community power within the clean energy transition.

⁸<https://www.nga.org/publications/workforce-development-in-the-iijsa-chips-and-ira/>

⁹https://www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/2026-02/Resilient_Communities_and_Affordable_Energy_Charting_Roles_for_Community_Finance.pdf

Strategic Pathways for CBO Leadership

This section outlines strategic pathways through which CBOs can take a leading role in the clean energy transition. These pathways are designed to help CBOs move from understanding the clean energy landscape to shaping how clean energy investments are delivered.

These roles are not mutually exclusive, nor are they a one-size-fits-all mandate. Instead, they represent a menu of strategic "hats" your organization can wear depending on your local political climate, internal capacity, and community needs. By exploring these different avenues, CBOs can rethink their influence and move from being witnesses to the transition to becoming the architects of a local green economy.

CBO as State Policy Advocate: Two Pathways

State policy serves as a systems-level tool that CBOs can leverage to scale the clean energy workforce in their communities and build a cohesive ecosystem that mandates local hiring and ensures job quality.

This section focuses on two primary state government levers: legislative action and executive action. The choice between legislative and executive levers is largely about which tool best fits the political moment. It is important to note the following power dynamics when deciding where to invest more time and resources:

- **The Legislative Lever:** Change in this arena typically takes a long time, but because these wins are codified into state statute, they offer a high degree of sustainability. They often provide the multiyear or multidecade certainty that businesses need to invest in local hiring and workers need to commit to a multiyear apprenticeship. Once a labor standard or 100% clean energy mandate is signed into law, it remains the "rules of the game," regardless of who sits in the governor's office, making legislation the gold standard for long-term structural change.
- **The Executive Lever:** Change through the executive branch can often be realized more quickly than legislation. When a legislative session is stalled or a federal funding window (like the Inflation Reduction Act) is closing, a governor's executive order (EO) can bypass gridlock to stimulate action and direct resources more rapidly. While executive orders don't involve the same institutional barriers as legislative action—because you only need to convince one person instead of dozens—their sustainability is more fragile: they can be rescinded by a future administration with a single stroke of the pen.

This section is the result of an analysis of state-level climate and clean energy legislation and executive actions enacted between 2021 and 2025. It features a sampling of policy models that move beyond environmental targets to prioritize the economic health and

sovereignty of the workforce. To arrive at this sampling of bills and executive actions, we conducted a targeted search for actions intersecting clean energy progress and workforce development.

To identify legislative policies that CBOs can advocate for to ensure underrepresented populations access high-quality careers with robust workforce protections, we searched using terms such as "equitable clean energy," "just transition," and "climate and jobs act." The following sections serve as a high-level summary of the results. Readers seeking a deep dive into specific provisions, technical language, and expanded significance for each bill can find the complete review in the *Appendix*.

CBOs can navigate these two levers of power—legislative and executive action—across three core strategic pathways: 1) driving high-volume market demand; 2) building the physical and financial infrastructure for direct training and just transitions; and 3) enforcing high-road labor standards and job quality. The following subsections characterize these pathways and offer policy models that ground these strategies in real-world scenarios. Each pathway addresses a different failure point in the workforce ecosystem; most CBOs will engage more deeply in one or two, depending on their leverage and local conditions

Pathway 1: Market-Side Demand Drivers

This pathway mitigates the market-readiness paradox—often called the “chicken-and-egg problem.” These policies seek to align workforce growth with long-term infrastructure deployment, ensuring that there is a sufficient project pipeline that translates into jobs as workers complete their training. Policies that stimulate long-term infrastructure investment help create the certainty needed to sustain long-term workforce growth. This demand can be driven by a variety of mandated outcomes, including:

- **GHG Reduction Targets and 100% Clean Electricity Deadlines:** These mandates require a state to reduce total emissions or transition the entire power grid to carbon-free sources by a specific year (e.g., 2035 or 2040). A key component of this type of outcome often includes compelling utilities to stop or slow investment in fossil fuels and start building and procuring significant amounts of solar, wind, and storage infrastructure, which can translate into utility- and community-scale construction and maintenance jobs.
- **Energy Consumption Reductions (Energy Efficiency Resource Standards, EERS):** An EERS policy requires utilities to help their customers save a specific percentage of energy every year through efficiency upgrades. Instead of just selling power, the utility is legally mandated to fund programs that seal leaky windows, insulate attics,

and upgrade lighting.¹⁰ This strategy creates a steady stream of work for energy auditors, weatherization technicians, and specialized contractors who are needed to physically go into thousands of buildings to hit those savings targets.

- **Specific Appliance Installation Targets:** These policies set numerical benchmarks for the deployment of specific technologies, such as heat pumps or EV charging stations by a certain date. By picking a specific technology, the state gives the private sector an approximate "hiring roadmap"—contractors know how many HVAC installers or electricians they need to put on payroll to meet the coming demand.
- **Dedicated Funding Streams:** The state channels funding through state energy offices or utility rebates specifically to cover certain project types or to lower the cost of clean energy projects. When the state provides a \$5,000 rebate for a solar array or a \$10,000 grant for a low-income home retrofit, it lessens or removes the financial barrier for the customer. By directly "buying" a predictable number of labor hours, the incentive results in additional projects that call for skilled workers.

These policies provide a level of "career certainty" required for workers to enter training and for businesses to scale up operations, ensuring that the shift toward a zero-emission economy remains a predictable and permanent fixture of the state's economic landscape. For CBOs, market-side demand policies matter not only because they create jobs, but because they establish the predictable project pipelines needed to justify long-term training investments, apprenticeship partnerships, and local contractor growth.

A. The Legislative Option: Building the Statutory Floor

Over the last few years, legislatures have established binding requirements for utilities and agencies to invest in localized infrastructure. The resulting project pipeline provides the "career certainty" necessary to scale a localized workforce. Some examples include:

- **Rhode Island HB 7277:** Mandatory 100% renewable electricity by 2033. Drives specialized demand in offshore wind, utility-scale solar, and storage.
- **Minnesota HF 1983:** 50% energy reduction target for existing buildings by 2035. Drives demand for energy auditors, HVAC, and weatherization contractors.
- **Hawaii HB 790:** Target of 50,000 new customer-sited Distributed Energy Resources (DERs) by 2030. Decentralizes job demand across all neighborhoods.

Together, these legislative actions demonstrate how statutory demand signals can anchor long-term workforce growth by creating certainty for both workers and contractors.

B. The Executive Option: The Administrative Fast-Track

¹⁰<https://www.aceee.org/topic/eers>

When a legislative session is stalled or a federal funding window is closing, a governor can use an executive order to bypass gridlock and send an immediate "hiring signal" to the private sector. While these lack the multidecade permanence of a law, they are vital for launching "proof of concept" pilots, stimulating supportive agency actions, and directing existing state agency funds toward immediate project starts.

- **New Jersey EO 316:** Mandated the electrification of 400,000 homes by 2030, with a specific requirement that 10% of low-to-moderate income (LMI) properties be made "electrification-ready." This mandate forced state agencies to immediately coordinate rebate programs and contractor outreach to meet the 2030 deadline.

Executive actions like this are particularly effective for launching immediate workforce activity when legislative timelines or federal incentives are constrained.

Pathway 2: Direct Training and Education Infrastructure

This pathway focuses on building the education infrastructure needed for community members to have an opportunity to access high-quality clean energy careers. This includes policies that reduce the barriers of entry into technical programs—such as HVAC, electrical, and wind technology—and ensuring that both new workers and those from declining industries can access the training needed for sustainable jobs. This pathway can include three key policy mechanisms:

- **Sustained Educational Funding:** Establishing dedicated Clean Energy Workforce Funds to provide funding for community college, vocational programs (classroom-based technical tracks), and apprenticeship programs (paid on-the-job training).
- **Barrier Reduction and "Navigator" Systems:** Beyond tuition, these systems can support wraparound services—including childcare, transportation stipends, and bilingual instruction—ensuring that residents from frontline communities can actually complete their programs and enter the workforce.
- **Legacy Worker Transition and Skill Mapping:** Creating formal "bridges" for workers in fossil fuel industries through a range of strategies, including prioritized enrollment, wage replacement during retraining, and the "mapping" of existing skills (like high-voltage electrical work or heavy machinery operation) to new, sustainable roles in offshore wind, geothermal, or grid modernization.

These investments are most effective when paired with strong market-side demand drivers that ensure training leads directly to paid, sustained work.

A. The Legislative Options

Dedicated Clean Energy Workforce Funds

- **Oregon HB 3409:** Creates the Energy Efficient Technologies Information and Training Fund. Prioritizes partnerships with locally and culturally connected organizations for technical assistance to help deliver programs.
- **Maine LD 1969:** Includes a direct pay compliance mechanism where mid-sized developers fund state apprenticeship programs to satisfy labor requirements.

Just Transition Legislation

- **Illinois SB 2408 - CEJA:** Creates a statewide system of "Hubs" and "Navigators" to recruit residents from equity-focused populations into training pipelines. Includes a Barrier Reduction Program (childcare, transportation stipends).
- **Texas HB 3125:** Directs the Texas Workforce Commission to create a Geothermal Energy Initiative, creating degree/certificate pipelines and formal employer–apprenticeship partnerships.

B. The Executive Option

Agency authority is used to launch specialized learning tracks and mobile infrastructure in underserved areas:

- **Massachusetts** developed a **Clean Energy Innovation Career Pathway** to bring high-tech training into high schools via executive partnership.
- [New Mexico 2024-152](#): Issued a mandate to coordinate 11 state agencies connected to climate readiness and workforce development to ensure 2,000 new workers are trained in clean energy infrastructure jobs by December 2026. Dedicated \$30 million to fund apprenticeship programs targeting applicants from Tribes, pueblos, and other unrepresented communities.
- [Pennsylvania EO 2023-17](#): Reserved 3%, or up to \$400 million, of all Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and Inflation Reduction Act funding received by the state to support employees and contractors in developing job training programs to close the gap in workers trained in infrastructure construction jobs. Additional funding to employers to provide services to support individuals facing systemic barriers to employment to support their participation in training and employment including, but not limited to, housing, care for children and dependents, work-related tools and clothing, educational testing, and transportation.

Pathway 3: High Labor Standards and Job Quality

This pathway focuses on ensuring that state financial assistance is strategically utilized to create high-road careers characterized by family-sustaining wages and long-term stability instead of settling for low-wage, temporary positions. By using conditionality, states can tie massive infrastructure investments, tax credits, and grants to specific labor standards that protect workers and strengthen the local economy. The scalability of the clean energy workforce is contingent, in large part, upon job quality; without the assurance of competitive wages, long-term stability, and comprehensive benefits, these sectors will struggle to attract and retain the necessary talent. While these standards are often challenged as costing too much or taking too long, evidence increasingly shows that high-road labor requirements stabilize labor supply, reduce turnover, and prevent project delays caused by workforce shortages.

This policy pathway features three key mechanisms:

- **Prevailing Wage:** A "wage floor" set by the state that requires contractors on public or subsidized projects to pay workers at a rate comparable to local union or industry-standard wages and benefits. This requirement prevents a "race to the bottom" where contractors win bids by undercutting worker pay.
- **Registered Apprenticeships:** "Earn-while-you-learn" programs that combine on-the-job training with classroom instruction. By mandating Apprenticeship Utilization Requirements, states force the private sector to invest in the next generation of skilled tradespeople, ensuring that every major project acts as a classroom for local workers.
- **High-Road Standards and Good Jobs Criteria:** A suite of comprehensive worker protections that includes hourly pay, mandates for health benefits, retirement contributions, guaranteed work weeks, and safety standards, ensuring that clean energy work provides the same security as traditional "legacy" energy roles.

To move these mechanisms from theory into practice, CBOs can leverage either the long-term durability of the legislature or the immediate agility of the executive branch to codify these labor standards.

A. The Legislative Option: Codified Conditionality

By passing laws that attach labor requirements directly to state financial assistance and clean energy bills, legislatures ensure that high-road standards remain the "rules of the game" for decades.

- **Prevailing Wage Requirements:**
 - **New York S.6708:** Expands prevailing wage to private projects receiving \$5M+ in public funding.

- **Virginia HB 2356:** Mandates prevailing wage for renewable projects over 1 MW; mirrors federal Inflation Reduction Act standards to maximize tax credit bonuses.
- **Apprenticeship Utilization Requirements:**
 - **Washington HB 1050:** Mandates 15% of total labor hours on state projects be performed by Registered Apprentices.
 - **Colorado SB 23-292:** Requires large-scale energy projects (1 MW+) to meet apprenticeship standards to qualify for state funding.
- **Good Jobs Criteria:**
 - **Maryland HB 169:** Links efficiency programs to labor protections (150% of minimum wage, collective bargaining rights, and health benefits).
 - **Alabama HB 352:** Conditions state tax incentives on worker dignity (guaranteed 40-hour weeks, paid emergency leave, and bans on mandatory overtime).

B. The Executive Option: Administrative Standards

When the legislative path is stalled, a governor can use executive authority to immediately mandate high-road standards on specific, massive state-funded infrastructure projects.

- **Oregon EO 24-18:** Requires state agencies to negotiate PLAs on major construction projects, preventing a "race to the bottom" on wages and ensuring that state-funded work is performed by highly skilled, local labor with negotiated benefits.
- **Pennsylvania:** Through the **E4 Initiative** of the state's Department of Environmental Protection, the executive branch conducts real-time workforce assessments to identify wage gaps and uses that data to prioritize state energy grants for companies that hit specific high-road hiring and wage benchmarks.

Choosing a Policy Pathway

CBOs should prioritize policy pathways based on their existing relationships, political context, and organizational capacity. Organizations with strong legislative coalitions may focus on statutory demand drivers, while those with agency access or time-sensitive opportunities may prioritize executive action. Across all approaches, the strategic goal remains the same: aligning project demand, workforce training, and job quality to produce durable community benefit.

Community-Based Organization Pathways: Building Durable Power

The policy pathways outlined above shape the conditions under which clean energy and workforce investments occur, but policy alone does not guarantee equitable outcomes. How programs are delivered, who controls assets, and where decision-making authority resides ultimately determine whether frontline communities benefit from the transition.

Ultimately, workforce systems are not just training systems—they are governance systems that determine who controls investment, access, labor standards, and long-term economic value within the clean energy transition.

This section focuses on the roles community-based organizations can play inside the clean energy delivery system. The pathways that follow are not sequential or prescriptive. They reflect different entry points into the system, each with distinct levels of responsibility, risk, and institutional capacity requirements. Some organizations may operate on multiple pathways at once; others may move between them over time as their infrastructure and strategy evolve.

These roles are not about “doing more” for the sake of growth. They are about positioning CBOs where decisions are made, capital is deployed, and value is captured. The following sections outline four pathways for building durable community power in the clean energy transition.

CBO as Policy Watchdog: The Accountability Model

In the Policy Watchdog pathway, CBOs help shape the rules governing clean energy workforce development, while also ensuring those rules are implemented effectively over time. Rather than serving only as outside advocates, CBOs can act as long-term accountability institutions by translating community workforce needs into policy, monitoring implementation, defending funding, and ensuring that workforce investments can actually reach frontline communities.

In this role, CBOs move upstream into policymaking and public accountability systems, helping influence how states define workforce standards, allocate resources, and measure success.

Why This Role Matters

Many clean energy workforce policies contain strong goals but weak accountability mechanisms. Even when legislation includes equity provisions or workforce investments, implementation can fall short because of agency capacity gaps, political turnover, industry influence, or lack of community oversight.

Frontline communities often experience these failures first. Programs may be underfunded, inaccessible, poorly communicated, or disconnected from the barriers residents actually face.

The Policy Watchdog pathway allows CBOs to stay engaged throughout the full policy lifecycle, from identifying workforce needs and shaping legislation to monitoring implementation and ensuring long-term accountability. This pathway positions CBOs not only as advocates, but as long-term stewards of the public systems shaping the clean energy transition.

What Policy Watchdog Work Looks Like

Policy watchdog work combines community organizing, policy development, legislative advocacy, and long-term implementation oversight. CBOs on this pathway work to ensure that workforce systems themselves operate equitably and effectively, from the creation of policy through agency rollout and enforcement.

This work often begins with identifying workforce barriers through worker listening sessions, surveys, research partnerships, and community engagement. CBOs then translate these findings into policy recommendations by participating in coalitions, educating lawmakers, organizing grassroots pressure campaigns, and engaging in legislative and budget processes.

However, passing legislation is only one phase of the work. After laws are enacted, CBOs can continue operating as accountability institutions by monitoring whether agencies are successfully implementing programs, distributing funding equitably, and reaching intended communities. These efforts can include advising agencies on program rollout, tracking outcomes, monitoring enforcement, and identifying implementation gaps when programs fail to reach frontline communities.

Case Study: Somos Un Pueblo Unido (New Mexico)

Somos Un Pueblo Unido is a community-based organization that represents immigrant communities in New Mexico's Permian Basin, where many residents work in the oil and gas industry under dangerous conditions characterized by long hours, workplace injuries, and economic instability.

As New Mexico expanded climate and workforce transition efforts, many immigrant workers remained excluded from traditional workforce development systems. Existing adult education, apprenticeship, and workforce programs were often inaccessible to rural and immigrant communities due to language barriers, transportation limitations, and lack of wraparound support services.

In response, Somos has operated in two complementary roles throughout the policy process: first as a legislative advocate helping shape workforce policy, and later expanding into a policy watchdog, ensuring those policies were funded, implemented, and accessible to impacted communities.

Throughout its history, Somos has invested significant time in understanding the workforce challenges facing immigrant oil and gas workers and building relationships within impacted communities. This organizing work has proved critical not only for

shaping legislation, but also for serving as a credible and community-accountable policy watchdog during implementation.

Somos partnered with the University of New Mexico's Center for Social Research to conduct surveys and focus groups with fossil fuel workers and their families in the Permian Basin. These discussions focused on unsafe working conditions, barriers to workforce training access, and participants' ideas for workforce development programs that could diversify New Mexico's highly fossil fuel-dependent economy. Somos and UNM later produced a joint report based on these findings.¹¹

This process helped Somos develop a deeper understanding of community workforce needs while simultaneously building an organized base of community members prepared to participate in legislative, budgetary, and implementation processes. Instead of speaking on behalf of communities, Somos built systems for directly impacted workers to shape workforce policy themselves.

Drawing from this research and experience, Somos helped translate community workforce concerns into policy recommendations and legislative demands. The organization presented findings to the Sustainable Economy Task Force Advisory Committee and mobilized members to testify during legislative hearings.¹² Somos also worked with coalition partners to shape workforce development legislation and advocate for state funding tied to workforce transition and adult education programs.

These efforts contributed to the successful passage of several workforce development measures between 2023 and 2026, including:¹³

- **HB 5**, which created a \$30 million workforce development and apprenticeship trust fund at the Department of Workforce Solutions;
- **HB 303**, establishing a workforce training pilot program;
- **HB 2**, the General Appropriations Act of 2024, which included funding for New Mexico's Adult Education Division and the Office of New Americans;
- **HB 167**, which expanded free high school equivalency testing and increased testing access in rural communities; and
- **HB 7**, which established ongoing annual appropriations for apprenticeship and workforce assistance programs.

Rather than treating policy passage as the end goal, Somos has remained engaged throughout implementation to ensure workforce funding and programs actually reached impacted communities. Somos monitored whether appropriated funding was being released, whether agencies were standing up programs on time, and whether rollout

¹¹<https://files.constantcontact.com/b6dfe469001/7eec220a-7cab-47d8-8370-62e981dc403a.pdf>

¹²<https://files.constantcontact.com/b6dfe469001/49796694-a2dd-4fe4-8860-adcde48ac60c.pdf?rdr=true>

¹³<https://somosunpueblounido.org/2024-year-in-review/>

efforts meaningfully included immigrant and rural populations. The organization also maintained relationships with state agencies to advise on implementation barriers related to language access, adult education expansion, wraparound services, and rural outreach.

Additionally, Somos and coalition partners participated in state budget processes to defend and expand workforce appropriations over multiple years. By continuing to organize community participation after legislation passed, the organization ensured decision makers continued hearing directly from impacted workers during implementation—not just during legislative negotiations.

These efforts secured millions of dollars for integrated education, adult education, workforce transition programs, and clean energy workforce development across New Mexico, including major investments in wraparound supports and non-extractive industry training such as:

- \$5 million for statewide Integrated Education and Training expansion;
- \$10 million for clean energy workforce development programs with wraparound supports; and
- \$17 million for workforce development in non-extractive industries.

These investments contributed to:

- The establishment of 50 new Integrated Education and Training programs;
- Expanded ESL, literacy, GED, and citizenship programming in rural communities;
- Increased Adult Education and Development enrollment;
- Expanded training in clean energy fields such as solar, wind, welding, and energy auditing;
- Workforce programming connected to community-serving careers such as childcare and phlebotomy; and
- Hundreds of participants enrolling in New Mexico's ASCEND cash transfer program.

The Somos case study provides a clear roadmap for how CBOs can translate community workforce needs into policy, funding, and implementation of workforce development programs. The policy watchdog model has been critical in New Mexico as much of the state budget is funded by oil and gas royalties. Without Somos serving as a policy watchdog the influence of the oil and gas industry might have blocked the implementation of efforts to transition oil and gas workers out of the industry and toward safe and sustainable careers in the renewable energy sector. Now, New Mexico communities have expanded pathways to pursue alternatives, and CBOs in other regions have a model to follow as they consider pursuing similar workforce development policy initiatives.

Why This Pathway Builds Power

The Policy Watchdog pathway builds long-term institutional and political power by allowing CBOs to shape not only individual programs, but the rules governing workforce investment itself. By participating across the full policy lifecycle, CBOs help determine which communities receive investment, which workers gain access to opportunities, and how agencies define success within the clean energy transition. This pathway is especially powerful because it transforms community organizations from outside advocates into ongoing participants in governance—and this sustained engagement helps prevent equity commitments from weakening during rollout or budget negotiations.

The organizational power built through this pathway also extends beyond workforce policy itself. Through participating in legislative hearings, agency processes, and state budget negotiations, CBOs strengthen relationships with workers, expand their organizing base, and increase their influence within state decision-making structures. Over time, organizations are able to build durable political infrastructure capable of shaping future economic development, labor, and climate policy.

Perhaps most importantly, the Policy Watchdog pathway ensures that frontline communities do not simply receive clean energy policy—they actively govern how that policy is implemented. In states where political and economic power has historically been concentrated among utilities, extractive industries, or large employers, this accountability role can help shift public systems toward more equitable and community-centered outcomes.

CBO as Project Negotiator: The Commitment-Securing Model

In the Project Negotiator pathway, CBOs directly negotiate with private developers, infrastructure companies, utilities, or public agencies to secure enforceable commitments tied to large projects. Rather than relying exclusively on legislation or state workforce programs, these organizations leverage community power to shape the terms under which projects are built.

This work most commonly occurs through Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs), Community Benefits Plans (CBPs), Project Labor Agreements (PLAs), host community agreements, or negotiated workforce commitments. In this role, CBOs move from advocating around projects to directly shaping workforce standards, hiring practices, and community investments connected to development.

What Project Negotiation Looks Like

Project negotiation work combines community organizing, coalition building, workforce advocacy, and long-term accountability. Unlike legislative advocacy, these negotiations occur within the timeline and economics of a specific development project.

CBOs operating on this pathway often begin by identifying how a proposed project may affect local communities and what workforce or economic needs should be addressed through negotiation. This work may involve community engagement, workforce research, public pressure campaigns, participation in permitting or public hearing processes, and coalition building across labor, environmental justice, faith, civil rights, and service organizations.

CBOs can also use these agreements to expand workforce access beyond traditional recruitment pipelines. While unions play a critical role in apprenticeship and training systems, some communities continue to face barriers related to language access, childcare, transportation, or limited recruitment relationships. Community-led workforce provisions can help close these gaps while complementing organized labor pathways. As a result, negotiated agreements often include local hire requirements, apprenticeship utilization standards, community-led pre-apprenticeship programs, workforce diversity goals, wraparound supports, and ongoing accountability mechanisms.

Coalition Building and Negotiation Strategy

Project negotiations are rarely won by a single organization acting alone. Successful campaigns often rely on broad coalitions capable of demonstrating political leverage and sustained community pressure. These coalitions can include labor unions, environmental justice organizations, faith-based organizations, civil rights groups, community service organizations, and workforce development nonprofits.

Strong coalitions allow CBOs to negotiate from a position of collective power rather than isolated advocacy. Internal alignment is also critical because developers may attempt to negotiate separately with individual organizations in ways that weaken broader community demands.

Many successful negotiations also involve partnerships with technical support organizations, legal advocates, or workforce intermediaries capable of helping structure enforceable agreements and implementation plans.

What This Pathway Requires

The Project Negotiator pathway requires a combination of organizing power and technical fluency. Organizations operating on this pathway often develop coalition management capacity, familiarity with labor standards and development timelines, legal support for enforcement, and systems for monitoring compliance after agreements are signed.

Unlike some forms of advocacy, this pathway also requires sustained engagement after negotiations conclude. Agreements only matter if implementation is monitored and communities continue exercising pressure throughout construction and hiring phases.

Case Study: Alabama Coalition for Community Benefits, Jobs to Move America, and New Flyer of America CBA¹⁴

The Alabama Coalition for Community Benefits, Jobs to Move America, and New Flyer of America provide a strong example of how CBOs can negotiate workforce and community benefits tied to major clean manufacturing investments.¹⁵¹⁶ This case study follows a process outlined by the phases of: 1) preparation, research, and scoping; 2) coalition building; 3) discussion of project parameters and negotiation; 4) execution of the agreement; and 5) implementation, accountability, and ongoing monitoring.

Phase 1: Preparation, Research, and Scoping

In 2013, Los Angeles Metro awarded New Flyer, North America's largest electric bus manufacturer, a \$500 million contract to produce 900 public transit buses. To fulfill this contract, New Flyer expanded its operations in Anniston, Alabama, while also developing a new facility in Ontario, California.

Communities near the Alabama facility wanted to ensure the expansion created high-quality jobs and accessible workforce opportunities instead of reproducing low-wage industrial labor conditions. Before negotiations formally began, community organizations identified workforce barriers and community priorities, including the need for wraparound supports, language access, flexible scheduling, and paid training opportunities for historically excluded groups.

Phase 2: Coalition Building

In 2019, community organizations formed the Alabama Coalition for Community Benefits (ACCB), a coalition of more than 25 labor, environmental justice, faith-based, social service, and civil rights organizations.

The coalition emphasized democratic decision-making and collective bargaining power while organizing workers and conducting workforce rights campaigns ahead of negotiations.¹⁷ This organizing work helped build solidarity among coalition members while also strengthening community leverage during negotiations.

The coalition's unity proved especially important because developers and employers will often attempt to negotiate separately with individual organizations, weakening broader community demands. ACCB maintained solidarity across organizations and insisted that negotiations occur collectively with the coalition as a whole.

¹⁴https://jobstomoveamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/0425-JMA_CBARC-Case-Study.digital.f-1.pdf

¹⁵<https://www.law.berkeley.edu/research/clee/research/law-of-the-sea-institute/california-offshore-wind/community-benefits-agreements-resources/#bb0-templates-toolkits-how-to-guidance-1>

¹⁶<https://cdn.catf.us/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/30172616/community-benefits-agreements-case-studies-federal-guidelines-best-practices.pdf>

¹⁷<https://www.alabamaworkers.org/alabama-workers-rights> .

ACCB also partnered with Jobs to Move America, a nonprofit organization with expertise in workforce standards and community-centered manufacturing agreements. Importantly, this partnership helped design community-led pre-apprenticeship infrastructure intended to support workers who may face barriers entering traditional apprenticeship systems.

Phase 3: Discussion of Project Parameters and Negotiation

In 2022, ACCB entered formal negotiations with New Flyer. The coalition established a negotiating committee composed of representatives from labor, environmental justice, social service, and civil rights organizations. Negotiations lasted several months and included ongoing communication with coalition membership throughout the process.

Throughout negotiations, ACCB pushed for workforce provisions that would both create jobs and expand access to those jobs for underrepresented communities.

The resulting Community Benefits Agreement included:

- Wraparound supports for workforce participants;
- Community-led pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship pathways;
- Workforce diversity hiring and promotion targets;
- Removal of conviction and arrest history questions from applications;
- Bilingual workplace materials;
- Anti-discrimination and anti-harassment protections; and
- Reporting, monitoring, mediation, and enforcement systems.¹⁸

The agreement specifically required that:

- 45% of new hires come from historically disadvantaged groups; and
- 20% of promotions be allocated to historically disadvantaged groups

Jobs to Move America also helped provide:

- Free training opportunities;
- Flexible scheduling;
- Participant stipends; and
- Workforce supports designed to improve apprenticeship completion.

¹⁸<https://cafwd.app.box.com/s/qz4vh5e7eof9sbpbhn8taerz4pcfp9t6>

Importantly, the coalition used the negotiation process to expand workforce access beyond traditional recruitment pathways while still complementing union apprenticeship structures.

Phase 4: Execution of the Agreement

The Community Benefits Agreement was officially executed in 2022 and established a legally enforceable framework governing workforce and community commitments tied to the project. While not every coalition organization ultimately signed the agreement, ACCB successfully secured enforceable community benefits standards tied to hiring, workforce development, accountability, and worker protections. The agreement also established long-term structures for communication between the company and community organizations.

Phase 5: Implementation, Accountability, and Ongoing Monitoring

After the agreement was signed, implementation oversight became a major component of the work. New Flyer began providing quarterly workforce reports and developed internal systems to track compliance with hiring and workforce provisions. The agreement also established mediation and arbitration mechanisms to hold parties accountable if commitments were not met. This ongoing accountability structure helped ensure the CBA functioned as more than a symbolic agreement.

Results

In the fall of 2023, the first cohort of pre-apprenticeship program participants began as a result of stipulations in the CBA. In this first cohort, 71% of pre-apprenticeship program participants identified as Black/African American, and 29% identified as women. New Flyer has surpassed the 20% promotion and 45% recruitment mandates for underrepresented community members. New Flyer has also created successful hiring partnerships with the local justice system and veterans outreach programs. The CBA's workforce development provisions, in tandem with separate union agreements with New Flyer, have resulted in wages that are above the county living wage.

The ACCB–New Flyer partnership demonstrates how communities can negotiate not only workforce training opportunities, but also long-term employment pathways tied to enforceable hiring commitments. By pairing community-led pre-apprenticeship programs with wraparound supports and accountability mechanisms, the coalition helped expand access to careers that might otherwise have remained inaccessible to underrepresented workers.

Why This Pathway Builds Power

The Project Negotiator pathway builds power by allowing CBOs to directly influence how private capital enters and operates within their communities. Rather than relying entirely on legislation or voluntary corporate commitments, CBOs negotiate enforceable

workforce and community standards tied to specific infrastructure and development projects.

This pathway is particularly important because many decisions shaping workforce opportunities occur at the project level: who gets hired; what wages are paid; whether apprenticeships are used; and whether local residents can realistically access training and employment opportunities. Through Community Benefits Agreements and related mechanisms, CBOs can intervene directly at the point where labor, infrastructure, and investment decisions are made.

Project negotiation also builds organizational power through coalition development. Successful negotiations typically require alliances across labor, environmental justice, faith-based, civil rights, and community organizations. These coalitions strengthen local organizing infrastructure while increasing the collective leverage communities can exercise over large employers and developers.

Unlike one-time advocacy campaigns, negotiated agreements often establish ongoing relationships between communities and employers through reporting requirements, implementation committees, and enforcement mechanisms. CBOs can thus maintain influence beyond project approval and continue shaping workforce outcomes over time.

Ultimately, the Project Negotiator pathway allows communities to move from reacting to development projects to actively shaping the terms under which development occurs. In rapidly growing sectors such as clean energy, manufacturing, transmission, and data infrastructure, this role can help ensure that large-scale investment produces lasting workforce opportunity and community benefit rather than displacement or exclusion.

CBO as Implementation Partner: The Access-Expanding Model

On the Implementation Partner pathway, CBOs take on responsibility for operating clean energy and workforce programs, not just advocating for them. This effort includes managing recruitment, service delivery, workforce supports, and compliance for programs funded by utilities, state agencies, or public authorities.

In this role, CBOs move inside the delivery system, translating policy, funding, and regulatory requirements into real outcomes for workers and communities.

How Clean Energy Programs Are Typically Delivered

Most large clean energy programs, particularly those run by utilities or state agencies, operate under a program administrator model. In this structure, the utility or state serves as the formal administrator, setting program rules, performance targets, and regulatory requirements.

However, these administrators often do not have the internal capacity or specialized expertise to run programs in-house, especially when delivery requires intensive

community engagement, workforce navigation, or localized implementation. As a result, they frequently contract with third-party implementers—or teams of organizations—to operate the program day to day.

This delivery structure creates two distinct implementation roles: implementation leads and implementation partners.

Implementation Lead vs. Implementation Partner

Implementation Lead (Prime Implementer)

The implementation lead is contractually responsible for overall program delivery. This role typically includes:

- Holding the primary contract with the utility or state;
- Managing the full program budget and reimbursement flows;
- Ensuring regulatory, labor, and reporting compliance; and
- Maintaining audited financials, internal controls, and data systems.

Because of these program requirements, implementation leads are often large, well-capitalized organizations such as multi-million-dollar nonprofits, national intermediaries, or consulting firms.

Implementation Partner (Scoped Delivery Role)

Implementation partners are organizations that deliver specific components of a larger program under the direction of the implementation lead. These roles focus on execution, access, and outcomes rather than full program administration.

As implementation partners, CBOs may be responsible for:

- Operating pre-apprenticeship or bridge training programs;
- Providing workforce navigation and case management;
- Leading community outreach, recruitment, and intake;
- Delivering wraparound supports (childcare, transportation, tools, language access);
- Coordinating locally with employers, unions, or training providers; and
- Collecting and submitting required data for their scope of work.

While implementation partners operate within a regulated environment, they are not typically responsible for overall program compliance, audits, or financial risk, which remain with the implementation lead.

What Implementation Partnership Requires

Even with a scoped role, implementation partnership requires significant operational capacity. CBOs entering into an implementation partnership must be able to function within programs that demand accuracy, documentation, and accountability.

This role often requires:

- Staff capacity to manage participants, timelines, and deliverables;
- Systems for tracking outcomes and participant data;
- Familiarity with reporting and documentation requirements; and
- Basic financial controls tied to contract reimbursement.

Strong internal infrastructure—particularly around staffing, data, and financial management—is essential, even when a CBO is not the prime contractor.

A Realistic On-Ramp for CBOs

For many organizations, the implementation partner role is a strategic entry point. CBOs often begin with a smaller, well-defined scope that aligns with their strengths and allows them to build experience without absorbing unsustainable risk.

Common entry roles include:

- Pre-apprenticeship operators;
- Navigator or workforce support providers;
- Outreach, recruitment, and intake leads;
- Wraparound service providers; and
- Data collection and reporting partners.

These roles help CBOs build a delivery track record, compliance experience, and credibility and can help position them for larger scopes or shared leadership over time.

Case Study: Somos Un Pueblo Unido (New Mexico)

Context

New Mexico's energy transition created both opportunity and displacement, particularly for immigrant oil and gas workers historically excluded from state workforce systems. State agencies and contractors launched clean energy workforce initiatives but lacked the trust and capacity to reach these communities.

CBO Role

Somos Un Pueblo Unidos served as an implementation partner, not the program administrator. Its role focused on access and workforce navigation, including:

- Recruiting displaced workers from immigrant communities;
- Providing culturally competent outreach and language access;
- Helping workers navigate eligibility, enrollment, and training pathways;
- Coordinating with training providers and workforce agencies; and
- Meeting defined reporting and performance requirements.

Why It Matters

Somos did not control the full budget or compliance framework, but by operating inside the program, it shaped who accessed opportunities and demonstrated that equity goals required community-based delivery. This role strengthened the organization's long-term influence over workforce policy and program design.

Why This Pathway Builds Power

Implementation partnership is not a lesser role—it is often the most realistic and effective way for CBOs to enter program delivery. By operating inside programs, CBOs gain access to data, relationships, and decision-making processes that shape how clean energy investments reach communities.

This pathway allows organizations to build power incrementally—moving from trusted delivery partners toward shared governance and deeper influence—while ensuring that clean energy programs deliver real workforce and economic benefits for frontline communities.

CBO as Asset Developer: The Autonomy Model

In the Asset Developer pathway, CBOs directly own, co-own, or control clean energy assets—such as community solar, building electrification projects, or thermal networks. Instead of influencing projects from the outside, CBOs shape them from the start,

determining where they are built, who is hired, how revenue flows, and how long-term benefits are distributed.

This pathway shifts CBOs from program participants or implementers to community-minded investors and stewards of infrastructure.

Why This Role Matters Now

As centralized energy prices rise, federal incentives wane, and private developers increasingly prioritize speed, scale, and shareholder returns, many community-scale projects struggle to move forward. Frontline communities are often left with limited control over what gets built locally and little access to long-term economic value.

At the same time, new tools such as direct pay, mission-aligned lenders, and public capital have lowered barriers for nonprofits to enter development roles. In this context, CBOs can step in where the market falls short, ensuring that clean energy investment remains local, accountable, and worker-centered.

Asset development is not just about deployment—it is a strategy for energy sovereignty, stabilizing costs and retaining wealth within the community.

Developer vs. Co-Developer: Two Entry Points

Asset Developer (Lead Owner/Sponsor)

As asset developers, CBOs can serve as the project sponsor or owner, with responsibility for:

- Controlling the site (land, building, rooftop, or easement);
- Structuring project financing and ownership;
- Contracting with engineering, procurement, and construction (EPC) firms, operators, and service providers;
- Embedding local hire, apprenticeship, and job-quality standards; and
- Managing long-term operations, maintenance, and revenue.

This role offers the greatest autonomy and long-term benefit, but also carries the highest financial, legal, and operational responsibility.

Co-Developer or Sponsor Partner

Many CBOs enter asset development through co-development or sponsorship partnerships with experienced developers or intermediaries.

In these arrangements, the CBO:

- Retains control over site access and community terms;
- Shares development responsibility with a technical partner;
- Influences project design, labor standards, and community benefits;
- Builds internal fluency in development, finance, and contracting; and
- Limits early-stage risk while gaining experience.

For most CBOs, co-development is the most realistic and strategic entry point.

What Asset Development Requires

Asset development requires access to land or buildings, alignment between leadership and board governance, legal and technical advisory support, and the organizational capacity to manage financing, compliance, and long-term operations.

Unlike program implementation, asset development places risk on the balance sheet, but also creates durable assets and recurring value.

A Phased Entry Strategy for CBOs

CBOs rarely move directly into full ownership. More commonly, they progress through stages:

1. Site Control + Community Vision (owning or controlling buildings, land, or rooftops)
2. Co-Development (partnering with experienced developers to deliver initial projects)
3. Ownership or Sponsorship (retaining equity, revenue, or governance rights)
4. Portfolio Development (replicating projects and reinvesting revenue locally)

This phased approach allows organizations to build capacity while limiting exposure.

Case Study: UPROSE as Asset Developer — Sunset Park Solar

Context and Structure

Building B at the Brooklyn Army Terminal now hosts a 725 kW rooftop solar array developed through a partnership between UPROSE (a Sunset Park environmental justice organization) and developer Working Power.¹⁹ Administered by New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC) and financed through public and federal sources, the project relies on a co-ownership model, positioning UPROSE as a community-asset developer, as opposed to just a delivery partner.

UPROSE's Role and Capacity

- Secured rooftop access via lease, enabling project siting on a major community-owned structure.²⁰
- Structured the cooperative ownership model, embedding community governance and long-term asset stewardship. UPROSE's organizational capacity—financial oversight, board alignment, and technical collaboration—was essential to meet development and funder requirements.

Community and Workforce Impact

- The solar array offers subscription-based savings (bill reductions of approximately 20%), totaling roughly \$1.24 million over the system's life for some 200 Sunset Park households and businesses.²¹
- UPROSE's ownership stake channels project revenue into a resident-governed community resilience fund, enabling reinvestment in local climate and resilience projects.
- The project generated local green job opportunities during construction and maintenance, with workforce components aligned to community benefits goals.

Why This Case Study Matters

New York City's first community-led, cooperatively owned solar project demonstrates how a frontline CBO can transition from advocacy into asset ownership. By controlling an essential clean energy infrastructure, UPROSE transformed its influence—from shaping program access to governing capital flows and workforce opportunity long-term.

¹⁹<https://hoodline.com/2026/05/brooklyn-army-terminal-roof-goes-solar-sunset-park-cashes-in/>

²⁰<https://www.brownstoner.com/brooklyn-life/sunset-park-solar-power-project-uprose-brooklyn-army-terminal/>

²¹<https://hoodline.com/2026/05/brooklyn-army-terminal-roof-goes-solar-sunset-park-cashes-in/>

Case Study: Restore Oakland — CBO-Led Asset Development for Community Wealth

Context

Restore Oakland is a community-centered real estate development project led by the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights (EBC) in partnership with ROC United, designed to anchor restorative justice, worker power, and economic opportunity in Oakland's Fruitvale neighborhood.²² The project emerged from years of community organizing and research documenting the economic and social costs of incarceration and displacement.

While the completed building does not include on-site solar as part of a broader sustainability and resilience strategy, Restore Oakland is showcased here as a clear example of CBO-led asset development with direct relevance to clean energy ownership pathways.

Rather than relying on external developers, EBC pursued a direct asset development strategy to retain long-term control over both the space and its social purpose.

CBO Role as Asset Developer

EBC functioned as a lead asset developer, guiding the project from concept through acquisition, financing, renovation, and long-term stewardship.

Key elements of EBC's role included:

- Leading feasibility and fundraising studies to assess project viability;
- Securing site control through a creatively structured, extended acquisition period;
- Partnering with Designing Justice + Designing Spaces to conduct a design process that engaged deeply with the community;
- Overseeing major building renovations, including seismic retrofits and full system upgrades; and
- Structuring ownership and governance entities to manage both the real estate asset and ongoing operations.

To support long-term stewardship, EBC helped establish 1419 34th Avenue LLC (property owner) and Restore Oakland (nonprofit operator), marking a significant shift from advocacy into asset ownership and management.

²²<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1CD067hxbevst3AJrrKRz-ZfGNW2-fkT9/view>

Capital Stack and Risk Management

Restore Oakland required complex layered financing beyond traditional program grants.

The capital stack included:

- A multiyear capital campaign that grew from a \$5M goal to \$22M raised;
- Philanthropic anchor funding, including a \$1M anonymous gift;
- \$11.5M in New Markets Tax Credit financing, structured with performance-based forgiveness tied to community benefit and job creation; and
- Bridge and mission-aligned loans to manage acquisition timing and cash flow.

This financing approach allowed EBC to retain control while managing risk through patient and values-aligned capital.

Why This Case Matters

Restore Oakland demonstrates that CBOs can act as full asset developers, not just project partners, if they are willing to build the necessary financial, legal, and governance infrastructure.

For the clean energy workforce and asset pathways, this case study shows that project ownership changes who controls risk, who captures value, and how long community benefits last.

Why This Pathway Builds Power

Asset development is about more than projects—it's about control over capital, infrastructure, and time. When CBOs own or sponsor clean energy assets, they can:

- Set the terms for job quality and local hiring standards;
- Stabilize energy costs for residents and institutions;
- Generate recurring revenue to reinvest locally;
- Reduce dependence on volatile centralized markets; and
- Anchor long-term workforce demand in the community.

While not every CBO will pursue this pathway, those that do move from influencing the transition to governing it.

Conclusion: Building Community Power Through the Energy Transition

The clean energy transition is not only an environmental challenge, it is a workforce and governance challenge that will shape who benefits from the next generation of infrastructure investment. Whether this transition produces broadly shared prosperity or deepens existing inequities will depend on who controls project development, workforce access, implementation, and long-term ownership.

This playbook outlines multiple pathways community-based organizations can pursue to shape those outcomes. Some organizations may focus on policy advocacy and accountability, while others may move into implementation, project negotiation, or direct asset ownership. These roles are not mutually exclusive; they represent different strategies for building long-term community power within the clean energy economy.

Ultimately, workforce systems are not just training systems—they are governance systems. They determine who receives investment, who accesses opportunity, what labor standards prevail, and whether wealth generated through the transition remains rooted in local communities.

The examples throughout this document demonstrate that community leadership is already shaping clean energy deployment across the country. By combining organizing, implementation, negotiation, and ownership strategies, CBOs can help ensure the transition delivers not only lower emissions, but stronger local economies, expanded workforce opportunity, and greater democratic control over infrastructure.

As states, utilities, developers, and communities navigate the next phase of the energy transition, CBOs have an opportunity to move from reacting to change to governing it.

Appendix

Workforce Development State Legislative Review

Pillar 1: Creating Market Demand and Investment

Core Objective: Establishing the "legislative floor" for a stable clean energy market that necessitates localized, high-volume hiring.

This pillar establishes the legislative floor for a stable clean energy market by moving beyond aspirational climate goals to create statutory market demand. By setting firm legally binding deadlines for 100% clean energy and greenhouse gas reductions, these policies force utilities and state agencies to invest in local infrastructure rather than purchasing out-of-state credits. This legislative certainty ensures that the shift toward a zero-emission economy is a permanent fixture of the state's economic landscape, necessitating a localized and consistent scale-up of labor to meet these mandates. The following examples are sourced from the Climate Equity Fund's policy playbook on **Utility Reform and Renewable Energy Targets** to illustrate how aggressive standards function as workforce engines.

1. [Rhode Island | House Bill 7277 SUB A | 2022 \(Enacted\)](#) - This bill updates the state's Renewable Energy Standard to require that 100% of Rhode Island's electricity be offset by renewable production by 2033. By moving the deadline to 2033, the state compels investment in local offshore wind (targeting an additional 600–1,000 MW), utility-scale and retail solar, and energy storage (600 MW by 2033). These installations drive demand for specialized workers to build turbine foundations at hubs like ProvPort, install thousands of solar arrays, and integrate battery systems into a modernized grid, thus creating high-volume entry-level opportunities for local residents and providing long-term "career certainty" for the local trades.
2. [Minnesota | House File 1983 \(HF 1983\) | 2023-2024](#) - This bill establishes an ambitious energy-use reduction goal of 50% by 2035 for existing commercial and residential buildings across the state. By focusing on the transformation of the existing housing stock, this bill creates demand for housing upgrades and retrofits. Reaching these targets will necessitate millions of individual interventions—from exterior wall insulation and attic sealing to the installation of high-efficiency heat pumps. This mandate directly drives a sustained surge in demand for energy auditors to identify efficiency gaps as well as specialized contractors (HVAC, insulation, and electrical) to perform the technical labor.
3. [Hawaii | House Bill 790 \(HB 790\) | 2025](#) - This bill establishes a state installation goal of 50,000 new customer-sited Distributed Energy Resources (DERs) by 2030

and mandates fair compensation for homeowners who export power back to the grid. This bill creates a massive, decentralized project pipeline for residential solar PV, home battery storage, and smart energy management systems. Unlike a single large power plant, 50,000 individual installations require a high-volume, hyper-local workforce of solar installers, journeyman electricians, and software integrators who can work across thousands of unique job sites simultaneously. This shift from centralized to distributed power ensures that the demand for skilled labor is spread across every neighborhood in the state, rather than confined to a few industrial zones.

Pillar 2: Job Quality and Standards Enforcement

Core Objective: Ensuring state financial assistance is used to create "high-road" careers rather than low-wage, temporary jobs.

This pillar uses conditionality as its primary tool. It ties the massive infrastructure investments from Pillar 1 to ironclad labor standards. If a developer wants state tax credits or grants, they must agree to play by high-road rules that protect both the worker and the state's long-term economic interest.

A. Prevailing Wage Requirements

Case study analysis of state bills that make subsidies and grants contingent upon paying prevailing wages.

1. [New York | S.6708 \(Prevailing Wage Requirements\) | 2025](#) - This bill expands the state's prevailing wage law to private construction projects receiving \$5 million or more in public funding, which prevents developers from undercutting local wages while taking state clean energy incentives. By making union-level wages the "floor," it ensures that entry-level workers from marginalized communities receive family-sustaining income while they learn the trade.
2. [Virginia | HB 2356 / SB 853 \(Clean Energy Apprenticeship Act\) | 2025 \(Vetoed\)](#) - This bill requires each public service company or third-party developer to ensure payment at the prevailing wage rate for any worker hired to perform construction, maintenance, or repair of Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS)-eligible energy sources over 1 MW. This moves clean energy from a low-cost infrastructure model to a high-road implementation model that ties the physical deployment of solar and wind assets to the creation of a permanent, skilled Virginia workforce. At least 15% of total labor hours on the project must be performed by qualified apprentices. Any contractor with four or more employees on a project must hire at least one qualified apprentice to ensure that small-scale infrastructure still contributes to training. By mirroring the Inflation Reduction Act labor standards, this bill helps Virginia projects qualify for the maximum federal tax credit bonus—boosting base

tax credits from 6% to 30%—making infrastructure projects more financially viable.

B. Apprenticeship Utilization Requirements

Bills mandating a certain percentage of labor hours by Registered Apprentices.

1. [Washington | HB 1050 \(Apprenticeship Utilization\) | 2024 \(Enacted\)](#) - This bill mandates that 15% of total labor hours on state-funded clean energy projects be performed by Registered Apprentices, includes monetary penalties for non-compliance, and requires monitoring of subcontractor hours. It creates a statutory demand for new workers, allowing CBOs to negotiate with contractors to place pre-apprenticeship graduates specifically from overburdened communities into these slots. The bill also requires a state study on project outcomes specifically related to participation by women, minority, and veteran-owned businesses, providing the data needed for targeted hiring advocacy.
2. [Colorado | SB 23-292 \(Energy Sector Labor Requirements\) | 2023/2024](#) - This bill creates a new category for large-scale energy projects (1 MW+) and requires projects under this category to meet existing prevailing wage and apprenticeship standards. To qualify for state funding or Public Utilities Commission (PUC) approval, contracts for electric generation projects of one megawatt or higher or other energy projects exceeding \$1 million must expressly mandate these labor standards for all contractors and subcontractors.

C. High-Road Standards and Good Jobs Criteria

Legislation establishing formal "good jobs" criteria as a condition for state incentives.

1. [Maryland | HB 169 \(Energy Efficiency and Conservation\) | 2024](#) - This bill requires the Department of Housing and Community Development to set energy savings goals while mandating specific labor standards for the contractors performing the work. Through the EmPOWER program, it also links utility-funded energy efficiency to workforce protections, requiring that state energy efficiency contractors pay at least 150% of the minimum wage, provide career advancement training, and offer benefits like retirement and health insurance (capped at 8.5% of earnings). The act also secures worker rights, including collective bargaining, paid leave, and unemployment insurance. Simultaneously, it initiates a disparity study due in late 2025 to evaluate the energy efficiency market and determine legally sound remedial measures to assist minority- and women-owned businesses, ensuring public funds drive both job quality and inclusive economic growth.
2. [Maine | LD 1969 | 2022](#) - "An Act Concerning Equity in Renewable Energy Projects and Workforce Development," this bill mandates that any "assisted" utility-scale clean energy project receiving state support must pay construction workers at least the prevailing wage and benefits rate, with exceptions only for apprentices

from registered programs that maintain facilitated entry agreements with pre-apprenticeship tracks. The bill also includes a pathway that reduces the administrative burden on mid-sized developers by offering a unique direct pay mechanism for projects between 2 and 5 megawatts; these entities can satisfy labor requirements by paying 2% of the total project cost into a state-managed fund dedicated to supporting Registered Apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship training. To ensure accountability, the "entity responsible" for the project must provide proof of compliance within seven days of a Department of Labor request, and failure to meet these standards constitutes a material breach of contract that can result in the recoupment of state assistance and mandatory remedial compensation for underpaid workers. While these requirements are waived for projects covered by a Project Labor Agreement (PLA), the law effectively hardwires high-road labor standards and diverse training pipelines into the state's renewable energy investment strategy.

3. [Alabama | HB 352 \(Economic Tax Incentive Worker Protections\) | 2026 \(Active\)](#) - Although this bill is technically tech-neutral, it functions as a critical high-road anchor for the state's clean energy sector by tying Alabama Jobs Act incentives to strict worker dignity and scheduling protections. Under this act, the Secretary of Commerce is prohibited from awarding the state's primary economic tax credits—the very funds currently driving Alabama's EV battery and solar manufacturing boom—unless a company certifies it will provide a guaranteed 40-hour work week, 40 hours of annual paid emergency leave, and a ban on mandatory overtime, weekend work, and rotating shifts. The legislation further protects employee time by prohibiting "off-the-clock" labor and ensuring that transit to bathrooms or breakrooms does not count against allotted rest periods.
4. [Rhode Island | H 7496 \(Climate Change and Ocean Protection Youth Act\) | 2024 \(Introduced\)](#) - This bill appropriates \$250,000 for a grant program administered by the Department of Labor and Training to promote climate change and green economy educational opportunities for youth (ages 5–18). It also creates a pathway for annual appropriations and mandates that 40% of all grant funds be directed to Environmental Justice communities.

Pillar 3: Workforce Pipeline and Just Transition

Core Objective: Building the human capital and institutional safety nets required to protect workers and scale community wealth.

This pillar addresses the professional career pipeline. It covers the creation of dedicated training funds, technical assistance for small businesses, and safety nets for workers pivoting from fossil fuel industries. It moves the focus from short-term task training to long-term occupational mastery and business ownership.

A. Dedicated Clean Energy Workforce Funds

Legislative creation of funds and advisory bodies prioritizing in-demand clean energy occupations.

1. [Pennsylvania | HB 1740 \(Renewable Energy Workforce\) | 2024](#) - Amending Title 27 (Environmental Resources) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, this bill establishes a roadmap to reach 100% renewable electricity by 2035 and total energy decarbonization by 2050, codified through legally enforceable interim caps on nonrenewable energy. The bill also includes workforce provisions to institutionalize job growth. It mandates that all energy projects exceeding 5 MW pay prevailing wages and creates a Council for Renewable Energy Workforce Development, which must include representatives from community-based organizations. Central to its Just Transition framework is a dedicated Workforce Development Fund financed by revenue from 100 MW of new state-owned solar, which must allocate at least 50% of its resources toward retraining and placing displaced fossil fuel workers.
2. [Oregon | HB 3409 \(Energy Efficiency Technologies Training Fund\) | 2023](#) - This bill establishes a comprehensive "human supply chain" for the clean energy transition by creating the Energy Efficient Technologies Information and Training Fund to build technical capacity across the state's construction and energy sectors. The bill mandates the State Department of Energy to provide continuous technical assistance and training for developers, contractors, and community-based organizations, specifically focusing on the installation and operation of high-efficiency heat pumps and electrical grid upgrades. A central feature of the legislation is the requirement to partner with locally and culturally connected organizations to deliver these programs, ensuring that environmental justice communities are prioritized for both the 500,000 new heat pump installations targeted by 2030 and the high-road jobs created by this demand.

B. Just Transition Legislation

Review of state laws providing support (wage replacement, retraining) for displaced fossil fuel workers.

1. [Maryland | SB 528 \(Climate Solutions Now Act\) | Enacted 2022](#) - This bill is one of the most ambitious state-level climate laws in the United States, mandating a 60% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2031 and reaching net-zero by 2045. The bill also links its decarbonization targets to a Just Transition framework and a dedicated service-to-career pipeline. The act formally establishes the Maryland Climate Justice Corps to provide young adults in overburdened communities with stipends and professional training in green infrastructure, while mandating that at least 40% of all climate-related benefits and investments flow directly to underserved populations. By requiring high-efficiency standards for new

public buildings and initiating a rigorous study through the Just Transition Employment and Retraining Working Group to protect the livelihoods of displaced fossil fuel workers, the legislation ensures that the state's path to net-zero is anchored in high-road labor standards and inclusive economic opportunity.

2. [Illinois | SB 2408 \(Climate and Equitable Jobs Act - CEJA\) | 2021 \(Enacted\)](#) - This landmark omnibus energy law established the Energy Transition Act, putting Illinois on a path to 100% clean energy by 2050. It also created the Energy Transition Assistance Fund, which allocated approximately \$180 million annually to support clean energy workforce and just transition programs. In addition, the bill institutionalizes a statewide system of Hubs and Navigators to provide outreach, education, and recruitment specifically for equity-focused populations. These teams partner with workforce hubs to ensure historically excluded residents are aware of and can access new training pipelines. The bill includes an Energy Transition Barrier Reduction Program to provide supportive services such as childcare, transportation stipends, and certification fees to ensure training completion. It also creates specialized tracks like the Illinois Climate Works Pre-apprenticeship Program (three regional centers for building trades) and the Returning Residents Clean Job Training Program for individuals currently or formerly incarcerated.
3. [New York | S 1997 \(Just Transition for Coal Workers\) | 2024](#) - This bill enacts the "Just Energy Transition Act," establishing a statutory framework to phase out the state's oldest and most-polluting fossil fuel facilities by 2030, specifically targeting those located in historically disadvantaged communities. The bill also mandates that redevelopment strategies prioritize worker retraining and the protection of existing labor rights, utilizing the specialized skills of the current energy workforce for decommissioning and new clean energy construction.
4. [Texas | HB 3125 \(Geothermal Workforce Initiative\) | 2025 \(Active\)](#) - This bill directs the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) to establish a specialized Geothermal Energy Workforce Education and Training Initiative to address skills gaps and prepare workers for the state's emerging geothermal industry. In collaboration with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and industry employers, the TWC is mandated to develop customized curricula for degree and certificate programs across public technical institutes, junior colleges, and career schools. The bill also requires the commission to identify and allocate existing workforce development funding for financial assistance and to facilitate formal partnerships and apprenticeships between educational institutions and geothermal employers.