



CEJA STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

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Illinois
Department of Commerce
& Economic Opportunity

SUMMARY

This document summarizes the findings of a stakeholder engagement process conducted by DCEO's CEJA implementation team in the fall of 2022. Recommendations will inform the development of the CEJA training curriculum and workforce programs. The stakeholder engagement process comprised six virtual and in-person listening sessions, 15 individual interviews or meetings, submission of written feedback, and administration of an online survey. Those who attended listening sessions included community members and representatives of community-based organizations (CBOs) (145), training providers (98), workforce and advocacy leaders (78), and employers and industry leaders (60). 161 individuals completed the survey. Stakeholders discussed training priorities, curricular recommendations, and significant programmatic supports to guide CEJA implementation. Unless otherwise noted, findings list recommendations from all stakeholder groups combined. We thank the many people who participated in this engagement process.

Training Priorities

When asked what jobs the training programs should focus on, stakeholders indicated that solar and electrical jobs were the most in-demand, followed by HVAC and building maintenance, wind, and automobile (electric vehicle focus). Overall, stakeholders indicated that solar energy should be the training area with the highest priority, followed by electric vehicle, electrical, green building construction, wind, HVAC/building maintenance, and manufacturing training. Though employers noted that technical jobs are more in-demand than general customer service, front office, or sales jobs, many stakeholders expressed interest in offering training for these less-technical jobs. Multiple respondents highlighted locational differences for each of these training priorities.

the end goal of training. CBO and community member stakeholders underlined the importance of quality jobs with income to support families, work located close to home, and abundant career advancement opportunities. They expressed concern that some clean energy jobs have low wages, few benefits, seasonal work, and limited career advancement.

Stakeholders agreed that short, stackable, industry-recognized, and employer-sought certificates would best serve program participants. They noted that training must align with industry needs and meet CEJA-identified basic standards. They wanted to ensure that employers were ready and willing to hire people who had completed the training.

Training Outcomes

Many stakeholders indicated the need for programs to provide well-rounded and flexible training so graduates can apply to a variety of jobs and advance in their careers, with high-quality, long-term jobs as

Curriculum Content

Stakeholders wanted curriculum to be holistic, not just focused on the technical aspects of the job. It should provide a consistent level of instruction and experience and be uniform across the state. They indicated that the curriculum should cover a variety

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of skills needed to gain employment, work independently and with others, learn throughout their careers, and function and perform technically and professionally on the job. There was a good deal of consensus among the employability skills, academic skills, workplace skills, and technical skills that training programs should cover.

The most cited employability skills included communication, time management, conflict management, basic life skills, listening and following directions. Stakeholders most mentioned math and reading as essential academic skills to teach, followed by critical thinking, communication, financial literacy, and writing skills. Employers commented that job seekers and candidates most lack communication and mathematics skills, which coincided with the skills training providers listed as most important. Employers further agreed with training providers that job seekers most lack problem solving and decision-making skills. The most important workplace skills noted by stakeholders included problem solving, job/career readiness (interview, resume, career pathways), teamwork, and work culture.

In discussing technical skill needs across different clean energy jobs, all respondent categories centered safety (e.g., OSHA, rooftop/height/ladder, wire/electrical, personal safety), followed by basic construction (including using hand tools and power tools), and electrical basics. Employers noted that operations, installation, and repair are the technical skills job seekers most lack, and training providers also ranked these technical skills as most important. Trainers noted that many students lack the ability to work with tools and technology. Commonalities in these technical skill needs hint at a “clean energy basics” curriculum that might include workplace safety, electrical, construction basics (such as

NCCER), and basic troubleshooting, installing, and repairing.

Stakeholders emphasized that DCEO shouldn't reinvent the wheel when designing the technical curriculum; they pointed to established, respected curricula and encouraged the new training programs to lean on these curricula. For solar, they recommended aligning curriculum with the NABCEP Associate program. Construction curriculum could likewise use the NCCER Core training. For building management, they recommend Building Performance Institute training or the Association of Energy Engineers (AEE) certification requirements for certified energy managers. In general, community-based organizations recommended that the curriculum be detailed and specific, while community colleges wanted more flexibility and freedom to design the curriculum themselves to meet industry needs.

Stakeholders also noted the importance of special clean-energy focused training to be added to existing training programs. For HVAC, stakeholders encouraged training programs to focus more on heat pumps and advanced automated controls. Electricians and electrical technicians should have training to install and maintain EV infrastructure. Training for automotive mechanics should focus on electric vehicle training.

Curriculum Delivery

Stakeholders emphasized that the delivery should be hands-on to counter classroom apathy and other barriers. When asked how the curriculum should be taught, stakeholders endorsed integrating employability, workplace, and academic skills into coursework, rather than presenting them as one-off units. They also emphasized different learning and

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delivery methods (such as one-on-one coaching and group learning) to account for the diversity of adult learning preferences. Especially with academic skills, stakeholders think self-paced, on-demand-style coursework will help trainees. Work-based, on-the-job, project-based, and scenario-based learning also proved popular among respondents. Stakeholders wanted early assessments (such as a TABE-like test for academic skills or a career aptitude interview) to determine skill levels. They wanted trainees to be able to demonstrate their level of competency and skip the sections of the curriculum they are already have already mastered. Assessments were also important tools to identify needs for extra training and support services.

Stakeholders noted the importance of offering different training options to improve accessibility. Both virtual and in-person options should be available, as well as part-time and full-time options offered at different times of the day, week, and year. All respondents spoke positively of short apprenticeship models that could be completed in less than a year, adding that these models should allow for flexibility in length depending on the job in question, trainee schedules, and individual life circumstances.

Delivery of Hub

Stakeholders wanted the organizations leading the hubs and delivering the curriculum to have two essential qualities: trust within the community and subject matter expertise. Community member stakeholders noted the importance of having the curriculum delivered by trusted community organizations that can represent, understand, and better reach target populations. Other stakeholders favored established institutions, such as community colleges, with strong infrastructure, subject matter

expertise, and qualified instructors. Some community stakeholders noted that that community colleges and other “established institutions” have a poor track record of serving target populations.

Many stakeholders noted that different educational institutions and community-based organizations could work together to deliver different aspects of the training. Some described a “hub and spoke” model where a lead community-based organization administers the hub, with a variety of other organizations and training providers supporting the hub. Hubs could utilize existing community training programs like Adult Basic Education (ABE) taught at community-based organizations for employability and academic skills acquisition. Some aspects of the technical training could be taught at a community college if the community-based organizations do not have the technical qualifications.

Finally, stakeholders expressed an interest in involving clean energy employers in program delivery. Employers should be encouraged to offer on-the-job training opportunities, visit classes, and provide mentorship to CEJA participants. They should commit to hire participants after they have completed training (and can be incentivized to do so through tax credits or other financial supports). Stakeholders saw strong collaborations among employers and community groups as essential to program success.

Reaching Target Populations

Stakeholders provided many suggestions for how the program should help recruit and serve the target populations outlined in the legislation: people in environmental justice or R3 communities,

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dislocated energy workers, returning residents, and foster care alumni. Stakeholders generally want programming and funding to support people who have been underserved, left out, stigmatized, or unable to access existing resources.

They noted that members of the target populations frequently face barriers including lack of knowledge of clean energy careers, academic skills gaps, testing difficulty, unmet prerequisites, long length, and difficulty completing programs, scheduling conflicts, transportation, family and childcare needs, training program costs, general financial insecurity, mental health challenges, and substance use. Returning residents faced additional barriers, including background checks, lack of driver's license, legal issues, employers unwilling to hire them, and drug test requirements.

To address these barriers, stakeholders emphasized the need for long-term, dedicated wrap-around services. They recommended that the hubs be a one-stop-shop model, with wide-ranging support services and well-connected infrastructure. There should be solid handoffs between organizations. Participants should be invited to identify what they need to succeed, and the hubs should work to meet these needs. At a minimum, the hubs should provide access to transportation and childcare, stipends, free books and tools, free or discounted tuition, funds for testing, access to mental health services, food, housing, clothing, and uniforms. Programmatic supports should include mentoring, tutoring, language instruction for non-native speakers of English, and life coaching.

