JOB TRAINING

Job training programs provide participants with the technical skills and certifications needed to participate in specific job markets. They can be used to address employment barriers such as workplace discrimination and discriminatory hiring practices that reinforce the racial wealth gap and deny marginalized communities access to wealth-building opportunities. Job training programs have been identified as one of the key strategies to address racialized gaps in both employment and earnings, and a key component of building economic equity. Green sector programs in particular are an important mechanism not only to open access to new green job markets, but also redistribute the wealth and benefits from the growing green economy. Job training is an often overlooked anti-displacement tool that can be used to build community capacity, place-based wealth, and the in-house technical skills to both own and benefit from community development.

HOW JOB TRAINING PROGRAMS WORK

In the green sector alone, job training programs can cover a variety of employable skills from green infrastructure installation and maintenance to education and auditing.

Usually these programs are targeted towards skill-building for entry-level jobs, but can also include more advanced certification programs to support career advancement.

These programs vary in structure, from 1-2 week professional certification processes, to multi-month hands-on technical skill development courses.

Job training programs may be funded and operated by a variety of entities, both public and private, including city agencies, educational institutions, and economic development nonprofits.

CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS

• Agencies prioritize contracting with job training programs, and implement local-hire and first-source hiring to hire program graduates and economically disadvantaged job seekers.
• Programs offer short-term stop gap employment for trainees while they are looking for more permanent work.
• Low-cost or free trainings with benefits such as food and childcare more effectively reach participants who are facing employment obstacles.
• Job training programs enforce safe working conditions and livable wages, and promote these community benefits as conditions of the contracts themselves.
• Programs work in partnership with existing community institutions such as community and technical colleges, libraries, and local nonprofits.
• Consistent and long-term funding sources ensure the longevity and reciprocity of green sector partnerships to better facilitate employment opportunities for participants.
• Designated liaisons mediate the transition between training participants and potential employers.
ECONOMIC JUSTICE IN THE GREEN ECONOMY

The green sector requires a skilled workforce for installation, operation, and maintenance of green infrastructure projects. These positions are often entry-level, but require specialized job training for qualification, leading to a demand that can outpace supply. Consequently, there has been a nation-wide emphasis on professional training within the green sector.

But even a green economy does not guarantee equitable access to the benefits of these new jobs. Without specific attention to economic justice, the green economy will merely reproduce existing conditions of wealth concentration and worker exploitation. Job training is part of a pathway for under-resourced communities to access career opportunities and financial stability. When paired with other tools like worker-owned cooperatives, the potential of job training programs to build community wealth is even greater.

Spotlight on: Atlanta CREW

Atlanta CREW (Culture-Resilience-Environment-Workforce) is a free green infrastructure job training program operated in partnership between Southface and the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance, two Atlanta-based environmental nonprofits. Through Atlanta CREW, participants go through trainings on installing and maintaining green infrastructure, have access to job fairs and employment opportunities, and receive a stipend for their participation. The program is targeted towards marginalized communities whose neighborhoods disproportionately suffer from flooding as a result of poorly maintained infrastructure in the first place. As Atlanta looks towards growing its green economy, Atlanta CREW is one avenue to redistribute both the environmental and economic benefits of this economic growth.

CONSIDERATIONS

Inconsistency Across Programs

There is little to no uniformity among certification programs. This means that job training can vary wildly from one place to the next, putting workers at a disadvantage for accessing jobs elsewhere. Those trainings that do offer nationally standardized curricula are often the most expensive and least accessible to entry-level workers.

Accessibility

Required training and certification programs can be expensive, may have non-flexible scheduling, may only be provided in English, can require certain levels of education, and may only be advertised to certain audiences. Because of this, there is a need to make necessary qualification trainings more obtainable for communities who may otherwise be kept out by monetary, linguistic, and educational barriers.

Wages and Unions

Despite the growing importance of green infrastructure projects in municipalities around the country, the accompanying jobs are often viewed and treated as low-skill, low-wage work. Park staff, landscapers, and other green infrastructure workers may face job markets with few worker protections, lower wages, and a lack of union support.