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Docket Number:	17-IEPR-08
Project Title:	Barriers Study Implementation
TN #:	221127
Document Title:	UC Berkeley Labor Center Email Regarding New Study Finds Diversity in Entry-Level Renewable Energy Jobs
Description:	DIVERSITY IN CALIFORNIA'S CLEAN ENERGY WORKFORCE: Access to Jobs for Disadvantaged Workers in Renewable Energy Construction
Filer:	Raquel Kravitz
Organization:	UC Berkeley Labor Center
Submitter Role:	Public Agency
Submission Date:	9/12/2017 1:47:15 PM
Docketed Date:	9/12/2017

From: "UC Berkeley Labor Center" <laborcenter@berkeley.edu>

Date: August 31, 2017 at 9:19:05 AM PDT

To: "UC Berkeley Labor Center" <laborcenter@berkeley.edu>

Subject: New Study Finds Diversity in Entry-Level Renewable Energy Jobs



DIVERSITY IN CALIFORNIA'S CLEAN ENERGY WORKFORCE:

Access to Jobs for Disadvantaged Workers in Renewable Energy Construction



Photo courtesy of IBEW Local 428

By Nikki Luke, Carol Zabin, Dalia Velasco, and Robert Collier

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Over the past decade California has emerged as a national and international leader in vigorously addressing climate change. Throughout this time one of the state's key challenges has been to ensure that the "green jobs" being created in the clean energy boom not only have good pay and benefits but also are equitably distributed

across the labor force. This report analyzes the degree to which California's underrepresented and disadvantaged workers have been able to gain access to career-track jobs in the construction of renewable energy power plants. The growth of renewable energy has been and continues to be a key element of California's climate efforts: policy-makers are now considering SB 100, which sets a goal of procuring 60 percent of the state's electricity from renewables by 2030 and 100 percent from zero-carbon sources by 2045.

In California, the construction of renewable energy power plants has primarily been carried out under collective bargaining agreements, known as project labor agreements, which entail the utilization of the state-certified apprenticeship system. Apprenticeship allows entry-level, unskilled workers to obtain free training, a job, and a defined path toward a middle-class career. Until now, little information had been available to assess the extent to which disadvantaged communities are able to access this opportunity.

This paper uses two data sources on entry-level workers in renewable energy construction. First, we use data provided by the California Division of Apprenticeship Standards (DAS) on enrollment in the apprenticeship programs of three principal skilled trades unions (Electricians, Ironworkers, and Operating Engineers) that have built renewable power plants in California from 2002 through part of 2017. The second set of data comes from Local 428 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) and concerns workers who built 27 solar farms in Kern County, totaling almost 2,000 megawatts (MW) of capacity between 2013 and 2017, which amounts to about 25 percent of the solar PV power plants installed in the state during this period.

Our key findings include the following:

- There is considerable ethnic and racial diversity, and improvement over time, in enrollments in apprenticeship programs of the 16 union locals of electricians, ironworkers, and operators that have built most of the renewable energy power plants in California. The share of people of color (all non-white categories) entering an apprenticeship in these three trades reached 60 percent in 2017, compared to 56 percent for the state's workforce as a whole.
 - New apprentices' racial and ethnic diversity varies significantly among the three trades. Latinos are 53 percent of ironworkers, 35 percent of electrical workers, and 23 percent of operators, compared with their 34 percent share of the statewide labor force. African Americans comprised 4 percent of electricians, 6 percent of ironworkers, and 9 percent of operators, compared with 6 percent in the statewide labor force.
 - As with the rest of California's construction industry, gender diversity in these apprenticeships remains minimal, with women comprising 2 percent to 6 percent among the three trades.
 - The presence of veterans in these programs is higher in all three trades than in the state's workforce as a whole, with veterans comprising 9 percent of new electrical apprentices, 6 percent of new ironworkers, and 12 percent of new operators, compared with only 4 percent in the overall California workforce.
 - On the 27 solar projects in Kern County, starting pay for entry-level panel installers was \$16.12 per hour in 2016, plus \$50 per day for travel, paid to all workers including local residents. First-year apprentices started at \$16.49 plus full benefits, and receive wage increases as they move through their five-year training program and obtain their journey card, with journey electricians earning over \$40 per hour.
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- Entry-level jobs on these Kern County projects have largely been filled by workers from disadvantaged communities. Data for 1,862 entry-level workers show that 43 percent lived in communities that are designated as disadvantaged by the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA), a rate much higher than the 25 percent rate for the general population. 47 percent of the workers lived in communities with unemployment rates of at least 13 percent, showing the importance of solar development for these communities.

California has an opportunity to build on this important track record of inclusion in the clean energy economy. The examples presented in this report show that project labor agreements and state-certified apprenticeship programs together can provide a vehicle for inclusion that produces results. The positive outcomes we detail are due to recruitment efforts by unions in local communities and the location of the projects: Kern County and the other areas where large-scale renewables are built happen to be in areas with high concentrations of disadvantaged communities. More complete data collection on worker outcomes could provide information for policymakers to build on the successful efforts of the unions and contractors, and, where needed, to help improve them via support for publicly funded pre-apprenticeship and/or local hire provisions.

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