

Using AB 118 Funds to Mobilize and Coordinate California Community College Workforce Development in Alternative Fuels and Technologies

Docket:08-ALT-1

The California Community Colleges are collectively the largest post-secondary system in the country. Our 110 colleges are accessible to every Californian. Theoretically, we have the capacity to respond quickly and at scale to emerging workforce development needs as the alternative energy and technology economy evolves.

Our ability to do this quickly, cost effectively, and responsively is severely hampered by the decentralized nature of our system. We are composed of 72 districts and 110 colleges. Each district is governed by a locally elected board. We are very effective at responding to needs that are local to our districts. Our resources, governance structures, and our staffing, are all optimized for operations at the college and district level.

Designing and implementing effective workforce development programs to meet the needs of the alternative fuels and technologies economy requires regional and statewide coordination. Here is an incomplete list of the kinds of activities that require or greatly benefit from regional and statewide coordination:

- Conversations between colleges and the companies that are investing in these technologies are critical to inform and align college programs with employer needs. Companies want a single point of contact or a single venue for discussion rather than trying to engage in effective conversation with multiple colleges.
- The demand for workforce development will not be so great as to require or justify each college developing its own program. Ideally we would offer just the right number of programs in the right places to meet industry needs and provide our students with access to programs and jobs. Absent any regional or state venue for planning it is very difficult for colleges to determine whether they should make the investment to start a program. They run the risk of over saturating the market if too many colleges jump in at the same time. Conversely there is the risk that no college will step forward because of uncertainty of whether there will be too much competition.
- Development of curriculum is currently done locally rather than regionally or on a statewide basis. Each college duplicates effort and produces programs that are similar but not identical. Instead of concentrating curriculum development resources to improve the quality and effectiveness, each college struggles to put something together that will be adequate to get the program off the ground. The variation in programs makes it difficult for students to transfer credit from one program to the next, essential for our mobile workforce. The diversity of programs makes them less visible or, if visible, confusing to employers.
- Professional development for faculty will be essential in a field that is rapidly evolving. Existing faculty who have expertise in instruction will need professional development to stay current with the industry. Faculty recruited directly from the industry for their

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knowledge may need instruction in teaching methodologies. Professional development is most cost effective when multiple faculty can participate in the training. Professional development that is not financially feasible on a college-by-college basis becomes affordable when faculty can be brought together from across a region or the state.

- A truly effective alternative energy and technology education program will start in the K-12/ROP system and continue seamlessly at the college level. Achieving consistency and alignment across the state's high schools may be several orders of magnitude more difficult. Community colleges through their relationships with their feeder high schools can be a vehicle for disseminating standardized curriculum. High schools are increasingly motivated to align their programs with community colleges to provide an early start for their students on a career path.

Clearly there are multiple benefits to developing the community college's capacity to work collaboratively at a regional and statewide level. How could the California Energy Commission support the development of this critical capacity?

The decentralized nature of the community college system makes it impossible to mandate regional and statewide collaboration. Colleges must choose to collaborate because they see doing so best serves their interests. A strategy has been developed in the Greater San Francisco Bay Area for fostering regional and statewide collaboration that has had some significant success. We call this a *marketplace* strategy. The basic notion is to create venues, virtual and real, where education, industry, and workforce development stakeholders can come together to learn what needs and assets each other has. In the process we have found that opportunities for collaboration spontaneously emerge. Colleges do see reasons to work together and they commit resources to following through on those opportunities.

The challenge with implementing this strategy is finding the resources to launch and sustain it. Creating the marketplaces is not expensive. It requires a skilled convener/facilitator, clerical assistance to carry out event coordination, and funds and technical expertise to provide web and telecommunications support. In the SF Bay Area an investment of less than \$50,000 per year has supported the New Energy Workforce initiative.

The NEW marketplace has provided a place for colleges and industry to come together and explore how they could collaborate to more effectively meet their individual missions. In the process a number of "deals" have been made. Different sets of participants in NEW through their participation in the marketplace have joined together to pursue a mutual interest. Some of the outcomes from NEW include: collaborative development of curriculum for solar panel installation courses, regional training for instructors in these courses, partnerships to seek grants to support collaborative curriculum development, a regional labor market study of the demand for photovoltaic installers and related occupations.

The marketplace model offers a way to realize the latent California Community College capacity for regional collaboration. With minimal investments the very significant investments the state is already making can be more productively coordinated and aligned. The California Energy Commission could provide grants to fund marketplaces targeting specific technologies. These grants could leverage resources far beyond the cost of the investment.

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