

Short Term Building Certification Training Programs are
Necessary for Seattle's "Executive Order 2021-09:
Driving Accelerated Climate Action" To Be Designed to
Promote Equity and Diversity in the Trades.



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Currently available training programs for green building construction are not sufficient to meet the demand created by enhanced energy efficiency regulations, performance-based building codes and incentives, and carbon emission reduction goals set forth by the City of Seattle. As additional training programs are funded and developed, specific measures must be taken to promote equity and diversity in the trades in Seattle, which are currently overwhelmingly white and male (Marlet 3). According to a recent report from the Seattle Jobs Initiative “the (Construction and Building Operations) industry is not diversifying as fast as the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue...population is” (Marlet 3).

The City of Seattle has taken bold action in committing to the goal of carbon neutrality by 2050. Achieving this goal will provide resiliency and improved quality of life for communities in Seattle, while simultaneously providing continued growth and commerce. On the 29th of October 2021 the Mayor released Executive Order 2021-09 which commits to specific actions to achieve an accelerated pathway towards “net-zero emission buildings, healthy and equitable transportation, and clean energy workforce development to advance climate justice”. The order sets a goal of ensuring that policies address racial, gender, and other inequalities that exist in the workforce. To support this goal a Clean Energy Workforce Committee has been created to provide an action plan to develop pre-apprenticeship scholarships and expand educational and training pipelines for green building construction.

Existing and future training programs must be designed to increase inclusion for BIPOC, women, and other non-traditional trades workers. The following recommendations will ensure BIPOC communities will not be disproportionately left out of the green energy economy due to a lack of accessibility, financial support, and outreach/training: Short term (one year or less) training programs, funded building certification training programs with clear outcomes, and

representative outreach within BIPOC communities will increase diversity and equity in the building certification and green energy economy.

For the second year in a row, U.S. energy efficiency businesses led the nation's energy economy in creating jobs. These businesses account for nearly half of the sector's entire job growth in 2018 (American). According to a 2018 Clean Energy Labor Supply report (ACP), there are 13,932 people employed in the energy audit and building certification sector in Washington State. While this report indicates the projected growth of 6.4%, or 891 new jobs every year in these trades, there are currently no publicly supported training opportunities for residents of Seattle to be involved in the work of building certification. The majority of this work is currently being done by businesses and individuals who live outside of King County and Seattle.

According to the report "Counting up to green: assessing the green economy and its implications for growth and equity" (Pollack), investment in green jobs trainings will especially promote economic mobility to workers without a college degree. The report further suggests that "industries that are greener tend to be more accessible for workers of a lower educational background". Trades careers have always been a pathway for upward social mobility for people who have non-traditional educational backgrounds.

As trades work is shifting into the green economy, effort must be made to provide clear pathways to employability within the building certification and permitting sector. With training, these green jobs are accessible to most workers without trades experience. For every 1% increase in green jobs intensity in a given industry, there is a corresponding 28% increase in the share of jobs in that industry held by workers without a four-year college degree (Pollack). Investment in green jobs training for BIPOC communities could promote economic mobility by

opening up the labor market to more workers without a college degree. The market will not naturally correct current inequities through simple supply and demand. Rather, people who already have career support through an employer and/or financial resources and mobility will quickly pivot into these positions. Current and persistent under-representation of women and BIPOC trades workers will only accelerate in the green energy economy unless concerted efforts are made to provide inclusive outreach and clear educational pathways.

Increased diversity in the trades will change the demographics of trades workers, which will allow BIPOC community members, women, and other non-traditional trades workers to envision themselves working in these roles. Most non-traditional recruitment is done by seeing non-traditional peers recruiting. The Seattle's Energy Efficient Building Operations and Construction Industries Workforce Report from 2021 found that the more diverse the workplace is, the more diverse it becomes, as BIPOC workers can recruit and serve as pathbreakers for family members and communities (Marlet 13). As an illustration of the impact of “peer” preferences, the study further concludes that “the lack of diversity impacts the occupations they supervise, as a lack of representation among managers and supervisors trickles down. White managers and supervisors hire and promote fewer BIPOC workers than BIPOC managers and supervisors” (Marlet 13). Through focused peer recruitment, non-traditional trades workers will see themselves represented in the industry. This will lead to a larger proportion of BIPOC workers in the trades and through higher representation, recruitment will further increase. Equitable representation in the trades will support enhanced and continued diversity.

There are many recent permitting incentives that are further driving the need for local and accessible certification training programs. The Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections has launched a Green Building Permit Incentives program. If new construction

projects will meet existing green building requirements (Built Green, LEED, Living Building Challenge, Passive House Institute, Evergreen Sustainable Development Standard), they can receive many incentives including faster review of project plans, additional development capacity, additional height, and an increased floor area ratio. To qualify for most of these incentives you must enroll or register your project with one of the above-mentioned organizations and hire an independent third-party Green Building Inspector who is certified by that organization to verify compliance which is demonstrated through a report (Municipal).

There are currently no funded programs to provide certification trainings for third-party inspectors in any of the listed standards. These building standards and certification requirements are being emphasized and utilized by the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspection to promote energy efficiency. They should also be utilized as high wage jobs that grow locally, become careers, and cannot be outsourced.

Most individuals with careers in the energy efficiency/sustainability and green building sectors have an extensive knowledge base in the subject and promote the principles embodied in them within their daily lives. Currently, very few people have an extensive foothold in this market and understand the need for a new approach, while the large majority of people are not actively engaged. More people need to be given opportunities to participate in all aspects of energy efficiency design and principals of sustainability to have a vested interest in making lifestyle changes. Funded green building certification training programs with targeted outreach will give more people a way to engage with efficiency and sustainability principles without requiring a proven dedication to the building trades. This type of employment should not require a lifelong commitment to the green building trades but should rather be thought of as a meaningful well-paying job engaging in the improvement and optimization of our communities.

Spreading and sharing this knowledge base with more people will increase the overall awareness of the need for energy efficiency improvements on a personal level within our homes and families.

There is already a labor shortage in the clean energy sector, and it is only going to continue to increase unless programs are funded to provide trainings to residents of Seattle. The green intensive industries that are large enough to provide a significant amount of jobs are ranked with construction, professional/scientific, and technical consulting services being largest. Apprenticeship occupations have high demand, long waitlists and strong projected growth in King County.

Current training programs are not equally accessible to everyone and are not adequate to meet the needs of the growing green certification industry by 2030, much less 2050. We must leverage and expand workforce programs like apprenticeship programs and the Seattle Promise program. Additionally, funding should be provided for short term (one year or less) training programs and building certification training programs with clear outcomes. Representative outreach must be provided within BIPOC communities. Public and private investment in training programs are necessary and will provide many co-related benefits to the Seattle community.

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